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Garth Brooks played to a sold out Calgary crowd in 2012.
CANDICE WARD/FOR METRO

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Capital city gets more shows added to Garth Brooks' tour run, metroNEWS

ON THE WRONG TRACK

Councillor calls conservative think tank's bike lane report 'garbage'
metroNEWS

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metro NEWS

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Weaknesses in cycle track stats

INFRASTRUCTURE

City defends data critiqued in Manning Centre report

Helen Pike
Metro | Calgary

A local conservative think-tank is peeling back the layers on how the cycle track pilot was tracked by the city.

On Thursday, the Manning Centre released a seven-page report pointing out what they believe are weaknesses in the city's data presentation, suggesting targets had been retroactively changed, and that some metrics marked with little to no progress actually fared worse — which they say wasn't a factor the city was tracking.

But Coun. Evan Woolley said their analysis is "garbage." The Ward 8 councillor pointed out the analysis doesn't take into account the fact that council approved the updates in a Dec. 15 evaluation plan.

"When the Manning Centre's biggest complaint in their report was they didn't like the colours we used to code outcomes, I find that disappointing," said Woolley. "We defend the data we've presented."

Woolley said the pilot collected more data than any other capital project, and said it's disappointing the Manning Centre is focusing in on a $5-million project.

"We would love to do this kind of analysis for all of the different infrastructure projects the city does," said Peter McCaffrey, the Manning Centre's director of research. "For a proposed new road, or the Green Line, this type of analysis has not been done… obviously it's a little harder to run a pilot project for a new LRT line."

He said the centre created the analysis so that council and the public could have an open picture of what the results were.

"The problem we have is the way city administration presented the data to the councillors was not the way they promised they would before the pilot," McCaffrey said.

Their report found, when comparing the original targets to the ones presented by administration in 2016, that 17 of the 106 metrics were retroactively changed to make targets easier to meet.

Most concerning to McCaffrey was the city's claim the tracks could improve safety for cyclists. He said they found that collisions on each leg of the track increased after the tracks were put in.

"The whole point of the cycle track — the justification for building it — was to improve safety," said McCaffrey.

He said administration reasoned that people were getting used to the infrastructure, which is why the collisions went up.

"Two years ago you said they'd go down, and it's very convenient that now that accidents have gone up, your message now was that we've expected them to go up," said McCaffrey.

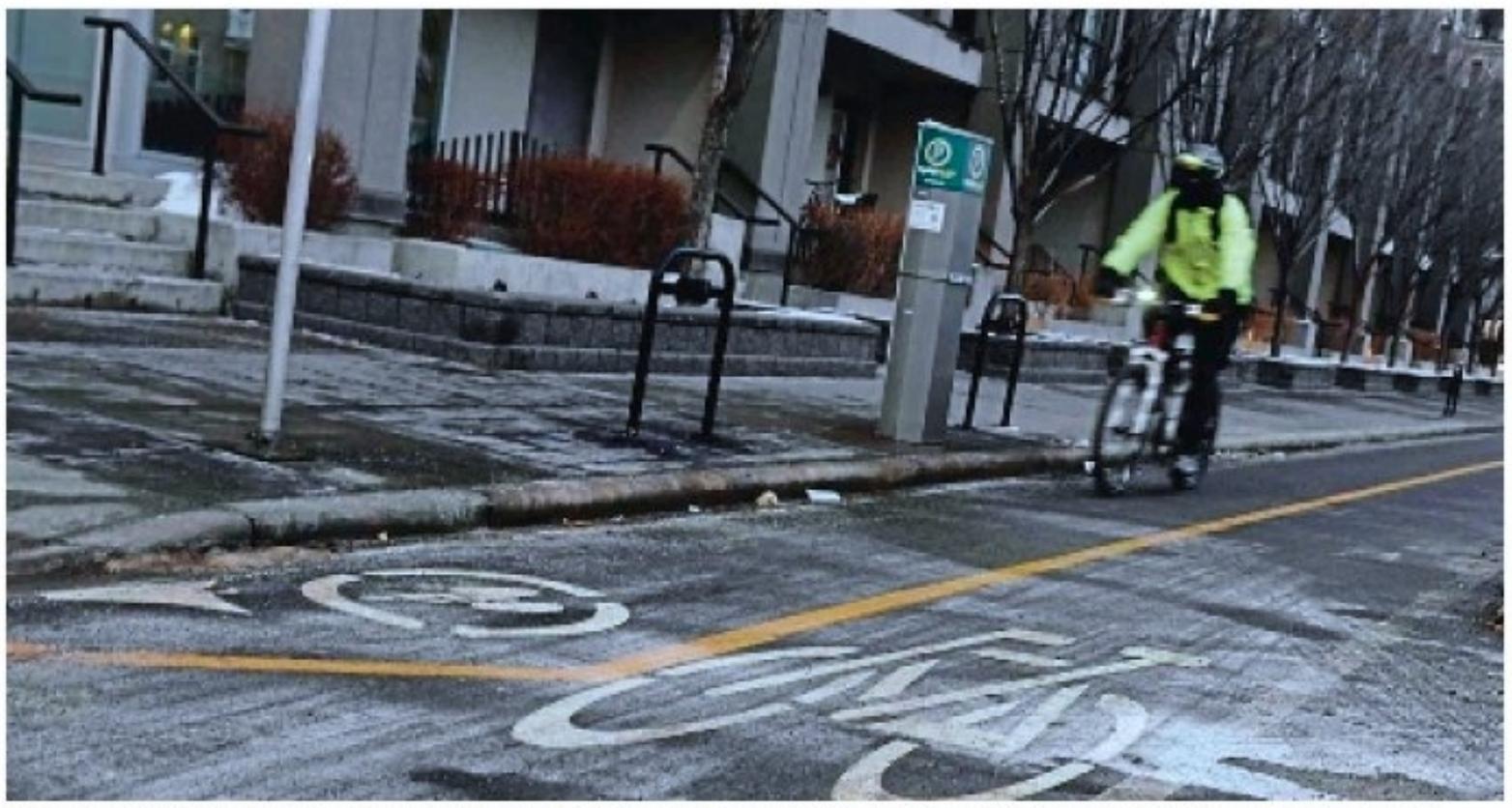
He said administration reasoned that people were getting used to the infrastructure, which is why the collisions went up.

But Woolley said when looking at the collision rates, overall in the core they are down for all modes, but up on the tracks, where a higher proportion of cyclists are now riding.

McCaffrey said he thinks administration "clearly wanted a permanent cycle track" in the first place, because the original proposal was not made as a pilot, and gained a few votes when it was changed to be an 18 month trial — influencing how the city presented the data.

Tom Thivener, the city's cycling coordinator said he's disappointed in the centre's report because it's full of inaccuracies.

"The basis of the Manning Centre's report is off, based on not referring to the most up-to-date evaluation plan," said Thivener.



Calgary's cycle track is a magnet for critics as the Manning Centre takes on the city's report and highlights their perceived flaws. JENNIFER FRIESEN/FOR METRO

Business support for project

Some of the city's big businesses are giving the cycle tracks thumbs up, just in time for council's discussion on the controversial infrastructure project.

On Thursday, Calgarians for Cycle Tracks, a grassroots group formed in support of the project in 2014, released a finalized list of letters of support from festivals, businesses and health officials for the $5.45-million pilot project, which wrapped up in September. The project is up for review by council on Monday.

Calgary's Downtown Association issued a letter to council last week, asking they consider removing the 8 Avenue cycle track because of its lack of performance, and negative effects on nearby businesses in terms of loading areas and parking availability. According to the association's website, they represent more than 3,000 businesses downtown.

Peter Oliver, who is behind Calgarians for Cycle Tracks, believes businesses against the tracks are a minority. He said the letters gathered by his group of volunteers show businesses don't just want the tracks to stay, they want to see the program expanded.

HELEN PIKE/METRO

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IN BRIEF

Man faces 23 drug and weapon related charges

A three-month long investigation by the Calgary Police Service has resulted in 23 drug and firearm related charges being laid against a Calgary man. "During the course of the three-month investigation, the Strategic Enforcement Unit seized approximately 25 grams of cocaine, a prohibited sawed-off 12-gauge shotgun and stolen property," said CPS. On Dec. 8, police arrested a man during a traffic stop in the 200 block of Shawville Blvd SE. Upon a search of his vehicle, police found 30 grams of powder cocaine, 25 grams of crack cocaine, drug paraphernalia and $200 cash. Police have since charged Hamid Ali Daryab, 22, of Calgary with 23 offences including trafficking cocaine and trafficking firearms. He's scheduled to appear in court Dec. 16. METRO

Drop-In wants you to give H.U.G.S to homeless

The Calgary Drop-In and Rehab Centre (DI) wants you to give H.U.G.S. this winter to homeless Calgarians. As part of a donation campaign called H.U.G.S. the DI is looking for hats, underwear (thermal), gloves and scarves throughout the winter season. The items are being requested in order to help prevent frostbite and hypothermia. Donations can be dropped off 24 hours a day, seven days a week at the DI, at 1 Dermot Baldwin Way SE. The DI gives more than 1,000 homeless Calgarians a place to rest every night. It was previously reported Calgary has a homeless population of more than 3,000. METRO

Calgary police are seeing fewer impaired drivers on the road. FILE

Impaired driving on the decline: Police

REPORT

Officers have a checkstop team out four nights a week

Lucie Edwardson
Metro | Calgary

Last year Calgary's impaired driving numbers dipped 19 per cent below the year before — a trend that Calgary police see continuing in 2016.

Staff Sgt. Paul Stacey said the downward trend in impaired driving numbers in 2016 is already 13 per cent below those of 2015 (year-to-date), and he gets the sense things are moving in the right direction.

Stacey said in 2014 a shuffle took place in the service, meaning they went from having five traffic response teams to four (a loss of around eight officers), and they also decommissioned their checkstop bus. He said in that time he feels they've done a lot to improve impaired driving enforcement in the city.

"I think we've done some positive things for the program that probably needed to happen a long time ago," he said.

Stacey said despite fewer bodies, they have a team dedicated to checkstops four nights a week (well, two teams — they each take two nights), and they now have two smaller checkstop buses.

"The checkstop bus we did has had over a million kilometres on it — it was on its last legs. It was out of service more than it was in service," he said. "Now we have two smaller check stop vehicles that do all the same stuff the big bus did and they allow us to go to areas where we couldn't necessarily get the big bus to before."

The staff sergeant said the lowering number of impaired driving charges coincides with fewer fatal crashes involving alcohol.

In 2013 Calgary had 18 fatal crashes involving alcohol — a number that was more than cut in half in 2014 and 2015, which only had seven each.

"This year right now we're at nine, but we've seen three of those that aren't alcohol related. Drugs alone are suspected on those," he added.

Stacey said he began to see a change in attitudes towards drunk driving when the legal limit legislation was passed.

"People didn't like it, they felt it was too severe, but that's not the case and I think people have started to see that," he said, adding that in the past it wasn't uncommon to see people blow over 200, whereas now the numbers are much lower.

ALBERTA HEALTH SERVICES

Influenza A strikes Calgary

A second Albertan with a lab-confirmed case of influenza has died, according to the latest data from Alberta Health Services (AHS).

"Influenza continues to wreak havoc," said Dr. Judy MacDonald, medical officer of health with AHS in the Calgary zone.

Information about the deceased, who lived in the south zone, is not being released to protect the individual's privacy.

"Calgary continues to lead in all (numbers), unfortunately," MacDonald said.

Since the influenza season began in late August, the Calgary zone has seen 532 lab-confirmed cases of influenza A.

The central zone comes in second, with a mere 60 cases.

Calgary also had a sky-high number of hospitalizations related to influenza compared to other zones, representing 134 cases of the total 189 reported in Alberta.

"It's a bit unusual, the Calgary zone is highly represented in the statistics and the other zones haven't caught up yet," said MacDonald.

She said the data reflects an influenza hotspot in Calgary.

"The frustrating part is that many people do not think influenza is serious," MacDonald said.

"The most important thing to protect yourself is get immunized. You will also protect those you interact with by not bringing influenza to loved ones," said MacDonald.

Typically, an influenza strain runs its course after six to eight weeks.

"Anytime now, we should see (this outbreak) easing off, but it's not the end of the influenza season…there's lots of winter left," said MacDonald, who anticipates influenza B will take a turn in the new year.

ELIZABETH CAMERON/FOR METRO

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Balfour Der, defence lawyer for Assmar Shlah, speaks to reporters about the murder case of Lukas Strasser-Hird at the Calgary Court Centre on Thursday. JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Verdict upheld in swarm death

COURTS

Defence argued that delay must nix conviction of three men

An Alberta judge has upheld the murder and manslaughter convictions of three men who argued their case took too long to get to trial on the basis of a landmark Supreme Court of Canada ruling earlier this year.

Lukas Strasser-Hird, 18, was beaten, kicked and stabbed by a group of individuals outside the Vinyl nightclub in Calgary on Nov. 23, 2013.

This summer, a jury found Franz Emir Cabrera and Assmar Ryiad Shlah guilty of second-degree murder and Joch Pouk guilty of manslaughter.

The men had argued their convictions should be thrown out based on the Supreme Court's Jordan ruling in July that put a limit of 18 months for cases to get to trial in provincial court and 30 months in a superior court, with certain exceptions.

The defence argued that 18 months should apply in this case because there was no preliminary hearing, but the judge ruled the 30-month ceiling was the one that mattered.

"Unfortunately, this case does not neatly fit into the two alternative ceilings," Court of Queen's Bench Justice Glen Poelman wrote in his verdict on Thursday.

The judge found that, while the case exceeded the 30-month ceiling by less than a month, the Crown had established its case for an exceptional circumstance.

Crown lawyer Ken McCaffrey said he was pleased by the ruling.

"Now we can get on to the business of deciding the fate of these three men who committed this crime," he said. "We can get down to the business of the victim impact statements. I'm talking about what actually happened that night rather than having the case bogged down in legal procedures."

> **If we don't comply with these rules, we have anarchy.**
> Balfour Der

Balfour Der, the lawyer representing Shlah, said an appeal is in the works for his client's conviction, and he's planning to appeal Thursday's decision too.

"I'm disappointed because I thought this was a pretty sound legal argument to make about the delay," he said. "My client's disappointed. I know his family's disappointed. Everybody gets their hopes up."

Der said lengthy legal delays are bad for all involved — the accused waiting to learn their fates and victims of crime eager for closure.

"Many, many years ago, there was an expression coined by somebody: Justice delayed is justice denied," he said.

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Garth Brooks, seen here at a 2012 Calgary concert, will be playing nine sold-out shows in Edmonton in February, while no shows have been announced for Cowtown. METRO FILE

Local fans react to Garth Brooks snub

MUSIC

Country icon to play shows in Edmonton but not Calgary

Josie Lukey
For Metro | Calgary

It looks like Calgary Garth Brooks fans are going to have to saddle up and ride to Edmonton if they want to see the country singer live.

On Thursday, Brooks announced another show at Rogers Place in Edmonton, which means the Thunder Rolls singer is now playing nine shows from Feb. 17-25, 2017.

Adam Bruce, a self-described super-fan, was five years old when he last saw Garth Brooks. He said although he's disappointed Brooks isn't coming to Calgary, he understands why.

"It's probably because the Saddledome can't have whatever show he's putting out," said Bruce. "I genuinely think it's entirely down to the fact he can't fit his set-up in the Saddledome."

Bruce also added that this calls for more pressure on the city to build a new arena that can hold larger stage shows.

More than 140,000 tickets have been sold for the Edmonton shows already, more than doubling his previous sales record in Alberta's capital city.

Brooks will be accompanied by his wife, Trisha Yearwood, for the shows. He's currently in the middle of a three-year Garth Brooks World Tour where close to five million tickets have been sold.

> It's probably because the Saddledome can't have whatever show he's putting out. I genuinely think it's entirely down to the fact he can't fit his set-up in the Saddledome. Adam Bruce

Hope Fulton is another Calgary super-fan who said she's miffed about not being able to shine up her cowgirl boots to see Brooks. According to Fulton, Brooks understands people who work for a living, and she thinks a show in Calgary during the current downturn would be fitting.

"He's got talent — he doesn't have to bury it all behind bells and whistles and a huge show in terms of craziness behind the scenes," said Fulton. "He genuinely just has this pure and honest voice and that's what you want."

Requests to Garth Brooks' management for comment on his Calgary snub weren't returned by deadline.

The last time Brooks played in Calgary was during the 2012 Calgary Stampede.

It was the only show booked in Canada at the time, according to officials from the Calgary Stampede.

ENERGY

Solar Road hits dead end

Brodie Thomas
Metro | Calgary

So roads infused with solar panels might not be coming to Calgary after all — at least not anytime soon.

The French company Wattway met with city officials in late November.

While a Calgary city spokeswoman said the meeting was interesting, the city won't be taking part in any projects for now.

"It sounds like the company may by testing it privately on their own property over the next couple years, but no plans have been set in motion to test it on public roadways," said roads spokeswoman Brittany Kustra. The company told Metro news in an email that it is still interested in testing the product in Canada due to its climate.

"We have to present the Wattway solution before asking for any authorizations to develop a potential trial site, even if at this stage, we do not have any projects in Canada public space yet," said the company in an email.

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25%

The drop in the number of suicides in the first six months of 2016, compared with 2015.

Suicide decline 'unexpected'

REPORT

Reason for decrease hard to pinpoint, says professor

Elizabeth Cameron
For Metro | Calgary

High suicide rates in Alberta appear to be decreasing, which one expert calls "surprising."

"It's counter-intuitive, you'd expect rates to go up when you have increases in economic distress," said Peter Silverstone, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Alberta.

In the first six months of 2016, 255 people have taken their own lives, according to information from the office of Alberta's chief medical examiner (OCME).

That's a 25 per cent decrease from 2015 — over the same period last year, 333 people committed suicide in the province.

Silverstone calls those statistics unexpected, but positive.

Because suicide is such a complex issue, the professor said it's difficult to pinpoint why the rates appear to be declining.

"If we're going to continue this in the long term, we need a comprehensive approach," Silverstone said.

The professor said psychiatric issues, especially suicide, have become a taboo in our society. Silverstone emphasized the importance of bringing the discussion out in the open to combat Alberta's higher-than-average suicide rates compared to the rest of Canada.

Mara Grunau, executive director at the Centre for Suicide Prevention in Calgary, agreed.

"Anytime there are fewer deaths by suicide, we are thrilled. However, we still have over 500 people dying by suicide in this province every year — and that's just unacceptable," said Grunau.

One troubling statistic Grunau highlighted is that for every female suicide in Canada, there are three male suicides.

"In Alberta, we have a lot of hyper-masculine, lone-wolf type industries like farming, ranching, and the oil patch," she said.

She said there is a positive cultural shift among young adults, but middle-aged men remain the highest-risk group for suicide.

"For middle aged men, it's not as common to talk about their feelings or show vulnerabilities," Grunau said.

She urged anyone considering suicide or concerned about someone they know to call the Distress Centre at 403-266-4357.

> **If we're going to continue this long-term, we need a comprehensive approach.**
> Peter Silverstone

PREVENTION

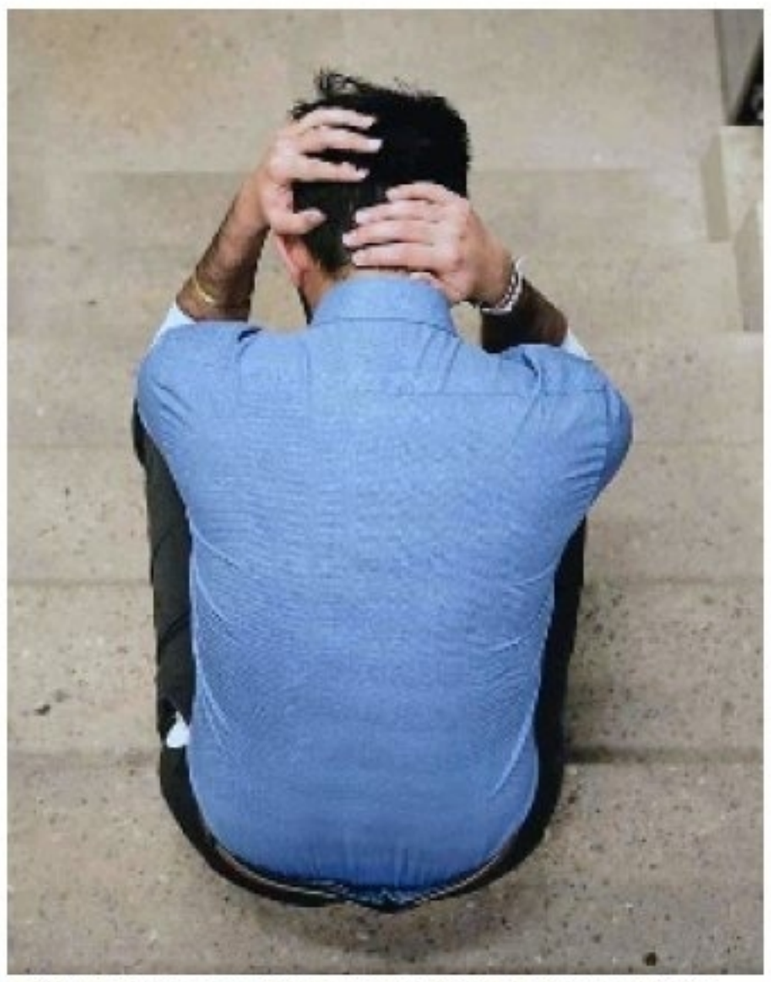
People at risk rarely seek help: Director

Although there have been several suicide prevention initiatives implemented by this year by Alberta Health, Mara Grunau said the vast majority of those at risk for suicide never visit a hospital or doctor for their concerns.

"We need to be able to respond to people in the hospital, but we also need to respond to them on the street," Grunau said, adding that it only takes one person to reach out and prevent a suicide.

Alberta Health singled-out suicide as a key issue for the province earlier this year, and is currently piloting a standardized risk assessment tool to identify those in hospital psychiatric units or facilities who may be a danger to themselves. The province is also piloting a project to give more mental health support to youth who may be discharged from hospital but unable to return home, as well as creating safety plans with at-risk patients to identify support systems and stressors.

ELIZABETH CAMERON/FOR METRO



While Calgary scored high in overall well-being, residents gave themselves a grade of "C" on perceived mental health.
JENNIFER FRIESEN/FOR METRO

Healthy city needs a lift

REPORT

Citizens rate low on their perception of themselves

Elizabeth Cameron
For Metro | Calgary

Calgary is generally healthy, but a new report suggests mental health is one area where we could use a lift.

The City Health Monitor report by the Conference Board of Canada awarded Calgary an "A" grade in health performance, but one outlier in the sunny statistics was "perceived mental health'"— Calgarians gave themselves a "C."

The report, published earlier this week, ranked 10 major Canadian cities based on four categories: life satisfaction, healthy lifestyle, population health, and access to health care services. Each category was broken down into six indicators of health.

"There's a huge brain trust in Calgary that is struggling for meaningful work right now," said Kathy Keough, director of counselling initiatives at the Calgary Counselling Centre (CCC).

"A lot of that is linked in different ways to economic issues," she added.

The CCC has seen a 23 per cent increase in demand for counselling services this year compared to 2015, with the most need for couples and depression/anxiety counselling, according to Keough.

"Anytime you're dealing with uncertainty or ambiguity, we're vulnerable to struggling with maintaining our mood or relationships because our energy is going in other directions, like finding a job and paying off bills," she added.

> **A lot of that is linked in different ways to economic issues.**
> Kathy Keough

Having a purpose in life, resources to take care of a person's basic needs, maintaining good relationships, and exercising are key factors of good mental health, according to Keough.

She said mental health is not discussed enough, and when it is, the tone is often negative.

"It's looked at as an individual deficiency, not something that any one of us is vulnerable to," Keough said.

WHERE YOU CAN GO FOR HELP

1 Seeing the signs

Changes in behaviour or mood and appearing depressed, sad, or withdrawn are all warning signs of suicide. If someone threatens suicide or talks about wanting to die, it's important to take them seriously.

2 Worried about a friend

Ask someone directly if they are considering suicide. If they say yes, stay calm and listen. Offer to call your local crisis line for them, or stay with them while they call.

3 You are not alone

It's estimated that one in five Canadians will experience a mental illness at some point in their lives. You are not alone, and there are people who want to help you.

4 Suicide prevention

Access to mental health care, restricting means, and education are essential to suicide prevention. Making schools, homes, and workplaces safe places to talk about suicide will help reduce stigmas.

5 Your life matters

If you or someone you know is considering suicide:

In Calgary, phone the Distress Centre at 403-266-HELP (4357).

In Edmonton, phone 780-482-HELP (4357).

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Alberta beer brewers are not concerned with U.S. marijuana market reports, confident their product sets beer apart. HELEN PIKE/METRO

Brewers unafraid of the big bad toke

TRENDS

Weed-legal states saw beer sales drop, but may not here

Helen Pike
Metro | Calgary

When weed becomes legal, it's unclear if Albertans swap suds for buds — but competing U.S. research suggests change could be in the air for alcohol sales.

According to a study of weed-legal states, Cowen & Company found sales for the brewing craft industry were hit hardest in Colorado, Oregon and Washington, trailing national averages over the past two years.

But another study by The Guardian found alcohol sales in Colorado have steadily increased, or seen no effect from legalization.

These figures are being closely watched in Alberta, and across Canada, but to compare these two markets is an apples-and-oranges game, according to local brewers.

Jim Button with Village Brewery said from where he sits big companies in the U.S. are crossing wires when they blame weed sales on a steady decline he says has been ongoing for some time.

"There's so many other impacts on beer," said Button. "In the U.S. the big player's sales are down, and the small players, and wine, and to a lesser degree spirits, are the ones that are actually impacting that. You can now add marijuana to that list of things."

He said his sales have been going up, as big beer sales go down, but to blame it on marijuana isn't fair.

Button, who's also the director of Beer Canada, says taxes in both countries are so different, it's hard to tell one way or the other what the market will look like when the feds legalize. The consumer reaction could differ depending on how heavily weed is taxed, compared to alcohol.

"I don't see it as a competitor," Button said. "There's no way that you could tell me I can have marijuana and have the same feeling as fresh local beer with flavours I love — it's just not the same thing."

Terry Rock with the Alberta Small Brewers association told Metro they have mostly been monitoring the situation in the U.S. through Beer Canada.

"We're confident that demand for Alberta-made craft beer is going to continue to expand in the foreseeable future, regardless of what happens with marijuana legalization," said Rock. "There's no substitute for the fresh taste of a local beer."

POLICE

Massage therapist charged with sexually assaulting client

A massage therapist has been charged with sexually assaulting a client, according to the Calgary Police Service.

On Nov. 21, a woman attended Bare Esthetics and Beauty Equipment in northeast Calgary for a pre-scheduled massage appointment, police said. There, the 26-year-old woman was allegedly sexually assaulted throughout the course of her massage.

According to police, when the appointment ended, the man left the woman in the room to dress.

When the she left the room, the man stood at the door and allegedly told the woman what had happened in the room was to stay between them. The man then provided the woman with a piece of paper with his name and number on it, telling her to call him, police said.

The woman then left the premises and called police.

Charged is Angel David Tinco Zambrano, 42.

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Post-secondary schools still lack space

YEAR IN REVIEW

Minister looks back on the highs and lows

Helen Pike
Metro | Calgary

With a year of tuition freezes, capital investments and a hands-on approach, the province's advanced education portfolio is cruising through the economic downturn.

But it's not all rosy.

Despite an optimistic nod from the province, complete with frozen fees for students and access to more funds for post-secondary schools, married with shiny new buildings thanks to infrastructure dollars, schools still lack space, and more students than expected are cashing in on grants to further their education.

Looking back on his first year (OK, 10 months, but who's counting?), Advanced Education Minister Marlin Schmidt said the government has treated education as a cornerstone of a healthy economy through the budget they've brought forward.

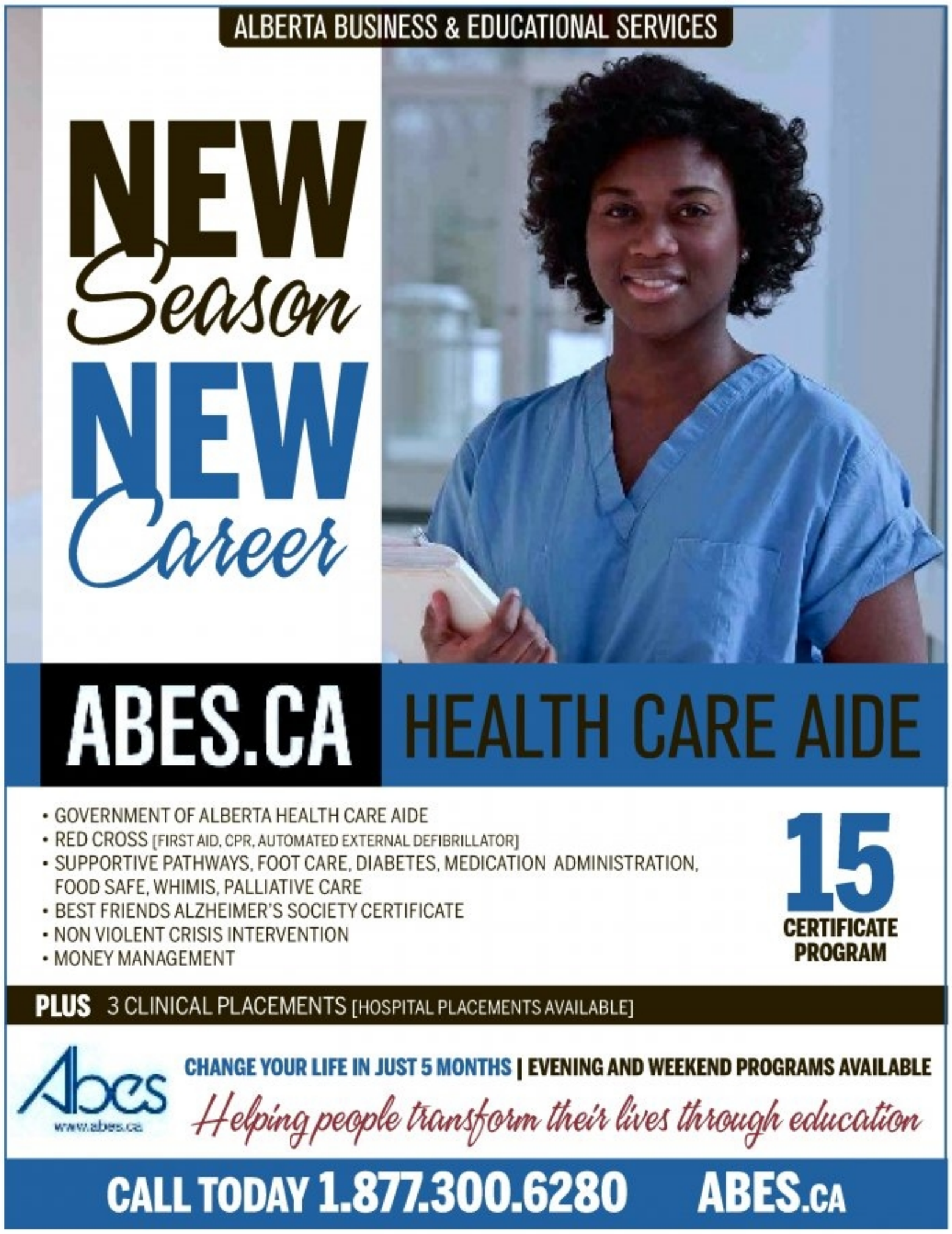
"Certainly space is an issue in some locations, particularly in Calgary," said Schmidt. "There's institutions that have challenges accepting demand, and that's leading to our decisions to invest in significant infrastructure."

Along with an increase in enrolment across the province, which Schmidt said he's been hearing from each of the 26 institutions the ministry represents, they've had a higher-than-expected draw for student loans.

"That's been an additional cost-pressure we've had to deal with," said Schmidt. The province anticipated under $600 million in student loan costs this year, when almost $700 million was needed. "We know Albertans are going back to school in large numbers, which is why it's so important to support the higher education system."

For the first time, the ministry also embarked on a transparent board application process, which Schmidt said opened the floodgates, capturing some candidates who otherwise wouldn't have considered applying in the first place.

"It's no longer the purview of party insiders and the old boys network that people thought was in charge in this province," said Schmidt. "I'm very pleased at the quality of the candidates that has come forward…I know they're going to do an excellent job."



Calgary's Park Plus system already has an app that allows you to pay on your phone, but a new app wants to help people rent out their unused parking spaces. JENNIFER FRIESEN/FOR METRO

SHARING ECONOMY

New parking app rolls out in Calgary

Brodie Thomas
Metro | Calgary

A new app that launched in Calgary this week wants to be the Airbnb for parking spaces.

CityParking is a Canadian app that allows people to rent out their private parking spots when they're not using them.

The app acts as the middleman between the parking space owner and the person looking to park. As the middleman, it takes 25 per cent, according to the founder and CEO of CityParking, Amin Dada.

After rolling out the app in Montreal and Ottawa, he's now trying it in Calgary.

"I saw Calgary's new downtown parking strategy coming into place — and then I realized that they're taking some really good measures," said Dada.

His company takes a slow-and-steady approach, relying mostly on word-of-mouth for uptake.

Since their July beta launch in Montreal, they've amassed about 2,000 users and have 55 active parking spots in that city at any given time.

The property owner does not get to choose how much they'll charge for their spot. CityParking sets the prices by zone. Dada said the price ranges from $1 to $3 an hour.

Users can look at a map and reserve a spot in advance before they arrive.

Dada said Calgarians had been downloading the app even before they launched on Wednesday.

"We haven't seen (parking) spots being put up — which is natural — but we've seen a lot of downloads," he said.

Dada isn't concerned about the current downturn in Calgary's economy and the fact that has led to readily available spaces in the downtown.

"The purposes of the app is not to just be a money-making machine," he said. "It's there and a solution to be used when situations arise."

A city spokesperson for the Planning and Development Department said Calgary's parking bylaws vary depending on what part of the city you live in.

He suggested calling the city's planning services centre at 403-268-5311 to make sure you can legally rent out your space.

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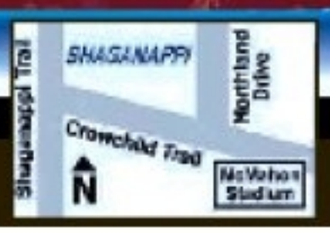

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Derek Fildebrandt wants to see a merger of the Progressive Conservatives and his Wildrose party. BILL GRAVELAND/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Fildebrandt renews his call for small-c merger

POLITICS

NDP 'too dangerous,' says Wildrose member

Alberta Wildrose member Derek Fildebrandt is renewing his call for conservative forces to unite.

Derek Fildebrandt says the people he has talked to in Alberta and his Strathmore-Brooks constituency say the NDP must go because their policies are destructive to the province's future.

"The NDP are too dangerous. They're too ideological and too destructive to the future of this province to take chances," Fildebrandt said after a speech Wednesday night in Whitecourt.

"I'm willing to put everything I've accomplished in politics on the line for this."

Fildebrandt has long been an advocate for a merger of the Progressive Conservatives and his Wildrose party.

> **"I'm willing to put everything I've accomplished in politics on the line for this.**
> Derek Fildebrandt

One of the candidates in the current PC leadership race, Jason Kenney, says if he wins the vote in March he will seek a mandate from members to merge the party with the Wildrose.

Kenney says vote splitting among small-c conservatives in the 2015 election led to an NDP win and only a merger can prevent that from happening again in 2019.

Wildrose Leader Brian Jean says he believes like-minded conservatives should unite, but says he is taking a wait-and-see approach to any overtures from the PCs. CIXM/THE CANADIAN PRESS

TRAVEL

Non-stop flights to Mexico City coming

Calgarians will soon be able to travel to Mexico City direct from Alberta.

On Thursday, the Calgary Airport Authority announced Mexico City will be the latest non-stop business connection from YYC Calgary International Airport. Aeromexico will operate daily flights from the new international terminal at YYC to link Calgary and Mexico's capital city.

Aeromexico will begin operating its Boeing 737-800 aircraft that seats 160 passengers on June 1, 2017. The flights will arrive in Calgary at 10:30 p.m. and depart for Mexico City at 11:00 p.m.

80

Currently, YYC offers nonstop flights to more than 80 destinations worldwide.

But that's not all the airline is expected to bring to Calgary.

More than 300 jobs will be created through Aeromexico, adding about $27.3 million to Alberta's economy, the airport authority said. METRO

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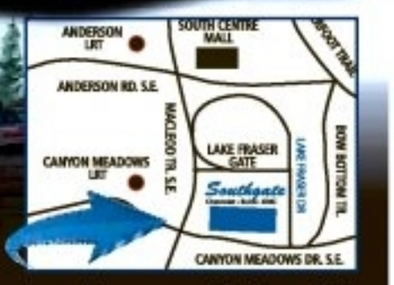

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WEEKEND EVENTS LOTS TO SEE, AND DO, AROUND TOWN

Friday: Artist Value
Jo-Anne Balcaen is both an artist and a cultural worker. She'll be speaking about the interplay of those two careers in The Artist Should Have Value at The New Gallery. Working in arts administration for more than a decade, she reflects on the inevitable power structures that form within the art world.

For more information, visit thenewgallery.org

Saturday: Skate with Santa
The big man himself straps on a pair of skates and hits the holly jolly ice at Olympic Plaza. For pros and first-time skaters, there will be rentals available or you can bring your own equipment.

There will also be a few performances from the Wild Rose Skating Club and free hot chocolate.

Visit calgarydowntown.com

Saturday: Once Upon A Christmas
Check it out before it's gone – Heritage Park demonstrates what Christmas would have been like 100 years ago. Special events include gingerbread cookie decorating, snow painting, a Christmas train, and admission to Gasoline Alley. There's also a vintage photo parlour.

For more, go to heritagepark.ca

Sunday: Carol of the Belles
More than a dozen Calgary artists are taking to the stage to gain funds to help junior high boys learn about empathy and consent. Now in its third year, the Carol of the Belles event raises money for the Calgary Sexual Health Centre's WiseGuyz program.

For more information, visit carolofthebellesyyc.com

AARON CHATHA/METRO

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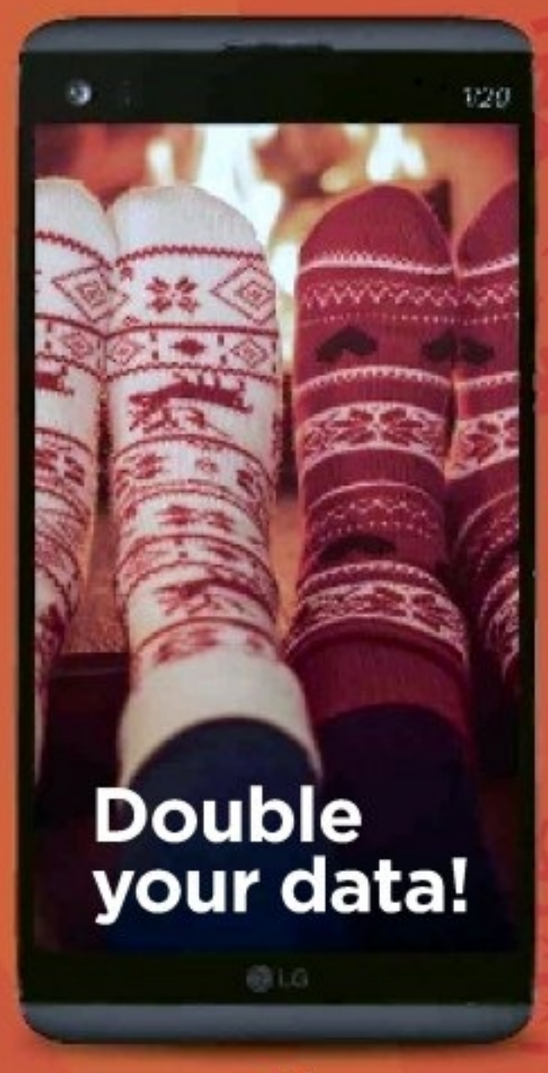

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Artistic director Jean Grand-Maître says The Nutcracker showcases Alberta Ballet at its **"most ravishing."**
COURTESY ALBERTA BALLET

Nutcracker 'beautiful'

ENTERTAINMENT

Alberta Ballet dazzles with classic holiday fairy tale

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

The much-celebrated ballet The Nutcracker returns to the Alberta Ballet from Dec. 16 to 24. Artistic director Jean Grand-Maître talks about magic and wonder the goes into the production.

What makes this version of The Nutcracker special?
We toured it across Canada, and everyone told us it's the most beautiful Nutcracker in Canada, so that was very humbling. It's a production we created in 2008; it was the most expensive ballet we ever produced at the time it cost well over $1.5 million.

It's one of those moments where the Alberta Ballet looks its most ravishing. We have, I think, 180 performers now, including the kids in the orchestra and the company dancers. So it's a grand spectacle.

At the same time it's a great dance, technically challenging, so adults love watching it. And for the kids, there's this amazing story about a little girl who's a hero, how she faces her fears, draws courage and is celebrated as a hero in the second act.

Kids get to discover ballet, story telling, costumes and lighting all in one performance.

Nutcracker's been one of the most magical ballets ever created and it's kept every North American ballet company alive probably for the last 60 years.

Why is it important to introduce children to the arts – especially through a performance like this?
The children can see the ugliness of today on the news and what's going on in the world. They have so much to see that disappoints them, and sometimes taking them to the theatre for an awesome experience with magic, lights, great music and beautiful dancing may remind them there's a lot of good things humanity can do as well.

I believe arts are important so children can be optimistic about the future. When you take them to the arts it changes the way they look at life — the younger, the better.

What is it about The Nutcracker that's enthralled adults, generation after generation?
It's like one of those great fairy tales. Like Cinderella, it has the right amount of reality and magic, with lots of transformations on stage. We go from the living room to a Siberian forest and then we're in the castle of the sugar plum fairy. There's a lot of magic. Then there's the fight between good and evil that's the heart of all fairy tales, and the discovery of the hero inside oneself.

For more information, visit albertaballet.com

Ali Hassan just wants to be a regular, funny guy — not defined by his religion. COURTESY TOUCHWOOD PR

Comedian battles Muslim stereotypes

SCENE YYC

Ali Hassan wants to fight xenophobia — by telling jokes

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

Unlike most Canadians, comedian Ali Hassan couldn't wait to leave Mexico — even if it meant returning to the blustering, icy winds of home.

That's because after years of playing bars and events, Hassan is now headlining his own standup show, which drops by Calgary in January.

And it turns out the timing couldn't be more important, considering widespread reports of xenophobia, locally and globally.

His show is called Muslim, Interrupted.

"It's a time, more than ever, to entertain. Comedy is great; laughter heals people," Hassan said. "It's a time to educate and inform, and comedy can do that in an incredible way."

In fact, his vacation to Mexico was a bit of an eye opener. He'd been to the country a few years earlier, and the other tourists were friendly; people said "hi" and smiled.

It was different this time around. Other guests didn't make eye contact. He wasn't acknowledged. Maybe it was because he looks very Muslim, with a darker tan from the sun, and a gaggle of four excited kids filling some sort of stereotype. It's not incorrect — he is Muslim, albeit more of a cultural Muslim than a practising one.

> **Laughter heals people.**
> Ali Hassan

Or maybe the whole thing was in his head.

"I have no quantitative way of gauging if maybe people were just in a bad mood and if it was just in my mind. But just the fact that I'm thinking about it is not a good thing," he says.

Hassan doesn't want to hit the stage and necessarily lecture or teach. But he does want to dispel some myths and change the dialogue. He wants to point out how ridiculous it is for people to worry about Muslims implementing Sharia law — where's the evidence in that?

Hassan points out that, yes, he's Muslim, but as a human he regularly uses a Crockpot, knows eight Blue Rodeo songs by heart, and loves eating ribs.

"It's important to try to put yourself out there, so if somebody goes, 'ah, they're all terrorists,' maybe one guy in the group will say, 'actually I saw a comedian the other day who was a Muslim,'" Hassan explains.

Hassan performs at Arts Commons on Jan. 20.

ANIMALS

Hundreds set to tally Edmonton birds

Gerald Romanchuk will have his eyes to the sky this Sunday when he heads out for the Edmonton Christmas Bird Count.

This will be the 15th year he's joined hundreds of Edmontonians in the annual tally of wild birds in the city.

"It's a chance to participate in a pretty big citizen science project. Volunteers go out and do bird counting so the biologists can look at general trends," he said.

Eager birders have been doing the early-winter bird census in Edmonton every year since 1955. Local volunteers are assigned circles of land 15 miles in diameter, and count all the birds they see.

The information is added to a database managed and analyzed by the National Audubon Society and Bird Studies Canada.

Eileen Secord, spokesperson for Bird Studies, said the count helps track trends in bird populations.

"It gives a really good snapshot of what birds are still around in the winter, when a lot of the migrating ones have gone further south," she said.

Last year, the Edmonton count saw more than 500 people tally over 27,000 birds from 55 different species.

The downy woodpecker, North America's smallest woodpecker, showed up in record numbers — 568 were spotted.

The house finch, known for the male bird's bright red head and twittering song, was also commonly sighted in the city. Volunteers noted 1,159 of the small birds.

SARAH HOYLES/FOR METRO

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The current fire log — which is about a 25-minute loop — is still stoked by the same mysterious hand as in 1986. COURTESY SHAW

Mysterious hand remains on-air

FIRE LOG

And no, it does not belong to Sasquatch: Shaw employee

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

For 30 years, the fire-stoking man on Shaw's annual Fire Log has been Canada's best kept secret.

Disappointingly, that's not going to change any time soon.

Carmen Salerno, director of in-house creative at Shaw, would only tell Metro that he takes his job very seriously.

"He's a very mysterious individual," Salerno said. "He likes to keep to himself because, you know, he has a very important job to do. So he doesn't get out in the public very often."

While he couldn't say whether the man is a Shaw employee, Salerno did confirm the hand does not, in fact, belong to Sasquatch (more disappointment).

What Salerno could say is that the current loop of the crackling fire was filmed two years ago, and that it gets reshot every few years, as technology gets better. And yeah, it's been the same guy's hand every time since 1986.

Originally, vice-president Ernie Poscente thought of the idea in order to get his employees some time off for the holidays. They couldn't just go off the air, so they filmed the fire and put it on a loop to give Shaw employees a bit of rest.

It became incredibly popular, and expanded from just being shown in Alberta to airing annually across Canada.

The new version, filmed in 4K, was shot in a small cabin north of Vancouver. Salerno was there, and the crew was actually shooting a commercial. There were crew members putting fake snow on the roof and cameras rolling outside when they noticed the beautiful, classic fireplace.

So they set up a camera and lit a fire.

"Within about 30 seconds, we were all covered in smoke and soot because the flue wasn't drawing anything," Salerno recalled. They ended up opening the door and all the windows, and throwing on a fan.

"We were looking for this pristine log and picture, and it just ended up looking like a toxic mess."

They ended up pulling out a pipe in the middle of the fireplace, which for whatever reason wasn't doing its job, and voila! The smoke went up the chimney.

Salerno was wearing a suede jacket during all this, and to this day, the jacket still hangs in his garage.

"Every once in a while, when I walk by, I still get a waft of the smoke; it's so embedded in the coat."

Shawn Trainor (second from left) as a Rebel Fleet Trooper, making plans with his fellow Star Wars cosplayers. COURTESY CURTIS WILSON

Diehard fans note alterations to gear

ROGUE ONE

Minor changes are made to Stormtroopers' iconic armour

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

It's the straps on the Stormtrooper outfits that fans are really geeking out about in Rogue One, opening this weekend.

"That armour is really difficult to wear and move in — and very hard to see in actually," laughed Deez Lees, spokesperson for the Calgary Badlands Garrison.

If you're unfamiliar with them, think of any event, from Comic Expo to a charity, in Calgary that's featured Stormtroopers. That's the Garrison — they're part of the 501st Legion, who costume up as the bad guys from Star Wars and attend events.

Naturally, they take authenticity very, very seriously.

"We've been analyzing pictures from the PR materials and the trailers — they've tweaked this there, so the legs bend a little better and you can actually run," Lees explained. "There's small differences we've been noticing."

The costumes look slicker, too — that's because new technology has allowed the costume makers to design better moulds.

It's the type of stuff only a diehard costumer and fan would geek out about. While the Stormtrooper designs in last year's Force Awakens were updated and changed, the Rogue One movie takes place right before Star Wars: A New Hope, so the design is very close to the classic. Many fans probably won't notice the minute details.

Not just Stormtroopers

Shawn Trainor is the commanding officer of the Outrider Base, part of the Rebel Legion. They're just like the Badlands Garrison, except they costume up as the good guys.

"One thing I'm excited about is the Rebel Fleet Trooper," Trainor said, adding he has a Rebel Fleet Trooper costume from the original Star Wars.

They're the guys with the blue shirts and elongated helmets who get blasted to smithereens by Stormtroopers in the opening scene of A New Hope.

"There's another version of them in this movie we've seen from the trailers — the costume looks very similar, so there's just a couple of additions to add to my existing costume."

> **There's small differences we've been noticing.**
> Deez Lees

Both groups are excited to see Rogue One in theatres, and find more costume opportunities.

For Trainor, a bit part of the appeal of dressing up as these side characters — as opposed to Chewie, Han or Vader — is how awesome it looks when you see a big group of them.

And not just at events like Comic Expo.

Both groups do a ton of charity work, and who will team up to appear in costume — good guys versus bad guys — during a special showing of Rogue One on Sunday, for sick and underprivileged kids.

"Yeah we love playing dress-up, but when you see a kid's face light up, that's what makes it special," Trainor said.

Members of the Badlands Garrison are excited to update their classic Stormtrooper outfits. COURTESY TERESA NUTHALL

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PM welcomes discussion with watchdog

FUNDRAISING TACTICS

Trudeau under fire in the Commons for weeks

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says he has no problem with answering questions from ethics commissioner Mary Dawson about his party's controversial fundraising tactics.

Trudeau has been under fire in the Commons for weeks over a series of private, $1,500-a-ticket Liberal party fundraisers with well-heeled donors.

Interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose has said the so-called "cash-for-access" practice smacks of corruption and asked Dawson to investigate.

A Globe and Mail report said Dawson agreed to question Trudeau on the issue to determine whether a more comprehensive investigation is warranted.

> **We will always work with the ethics commissioner and anyone else who has questions of this government.** Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

A spokeswoman for Dawson's office would not confirm the report Thursday.

Trudeau has been pilloried in question period by the opposition because of a list of rules he handed out to his cabinet on taking office, warning ministers away from offering preferential access or even creating the perception of such access for party donors. However, with the Commons adjourned to the end of January, that public pressure has eased for the moment.

Trudeau told a news conference Thursday he wants to retain public confidence and maintain high ethical standards.

"I look forward to making sure we provide answers to anyone who is asking us questions about particular aspects of this government's functioning, as is responsible for our various commissioners and officials to do."

He said part of his government's commitment is to respect rules and laws.

"That is something we have consistently done and will consistently do," he said. "We have very strict rules on fundraising at the federal level and no one is suggesting we are not following those rules."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Marc Emery, who owns the Cannabis Culture brand with his wife Jodie, right, gestures at the opening of one of their pot stores Thursday in Montreal. Several other pot dispensaries are set to open in Montreal this week that will be selling marijuana to recreational users, despite federal rules that forbid such shops. THE CANADIAN PRESS

MONTREAL

Pot stores sell to recreational users

Montreal's mayor vowed zero tolerance for illegal pot dispensaries on Thursday, just hours after several such establishments aimed at recreational users opened to the public.

Denis Coderre tweeted the city would use any administrative tools at its disposal to enforce the law.

The pot boutiques opened in the presence of two well-known marijuana activists from Vancouver behind the Cannabis Culture stores and brand.

Storefront outlets are popping up as Ottawa forges ahead with plans to legalize marijuana, with legislation expected in the spring.

Jodie Emery told a news conference at one of the stores that while they are illegal under current federal legislation, she hopes local authorities will leave them be.

Under store policy, anyone 19 and older will be able to buy marijuana, without membership or medical requirements. The shops will pay taxes, employ locals and won't allow children inside.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

SASKATCHEWAN

Prison riot leaves 1 dead, 8 injured

A riot involving 185 prisoners at a prison in northern Saskatchewan has left one inmate dead, eight prisoners injured and a large part of the institution uninhabitable.

Correctional Service Canada spokesman Jeff Campbell said the riot at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert started Wednesday in the medium-security unit, which houses 377 prisoners.

"They set up barricades. They lit some fires. There was also an assault on some inmates, one of whom has unfortunately died from his injuries," Campbell said Thursday in a phone interview.

The dead inmate, Jason Leonard Bird, was 43 and had been serving a sentence of two years and seven months since February for break and enter and theft convictions.

Two other inmates were also hurt seriously enough to be taken to hospital.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Family lost in house fire

ONTARIO

First Nation community struggling with the loss

A father, three young children and a baby are believed to have died in a fire that destroyed their home and ripped apart this First Nation community amid efforts Thursday to recover and identify the charred remains of the victims.

Shocked community leaders and residents struggled to come to terms with the devastating loss that occurred about 12 hours after a blaze in Port Colborne, Ont., also claimed the lives of four family members.

"We've only started to understand what has happened," Randall Phillips, chief of the Oneida Nation of the Thames, said Thursday. "Our community is suffering. There's not a person in this community that doesn't know one of the victims or the victims' family."

Relatives of the dead were in shock, and heart-broken, Phillips said, adding that a forensic anthropologist had only managed to identify the remains of the adult and one of the children.

Fire officials attend the scene of a house fire on Oneida Nation of the Thames reserve on Thursday. THE CANADIAN PRESS

A man who said he was a brother of the deceased father shooed photographers from the blackened frame of the house on the edge of the town as firefighters and investigators worked in the wreckage of the home.

> **We've only started to understand what has happened.**
> Randall Phillips

Firefighters arriving on the scene in frigid temperatures at about 11 a.m. Wednesday could do little more than douse the flames, which took about two hours. The cause remained under investigation.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Lucky Luna survives train hit

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Luna the dog is dog-gone lucky.

The precocious pup, an Australian shepherd-border collie mix, was hit by a GO train Dec. 7 in Toronto, Ont. Despite being pulled under the vehicle, she survived unscathed.

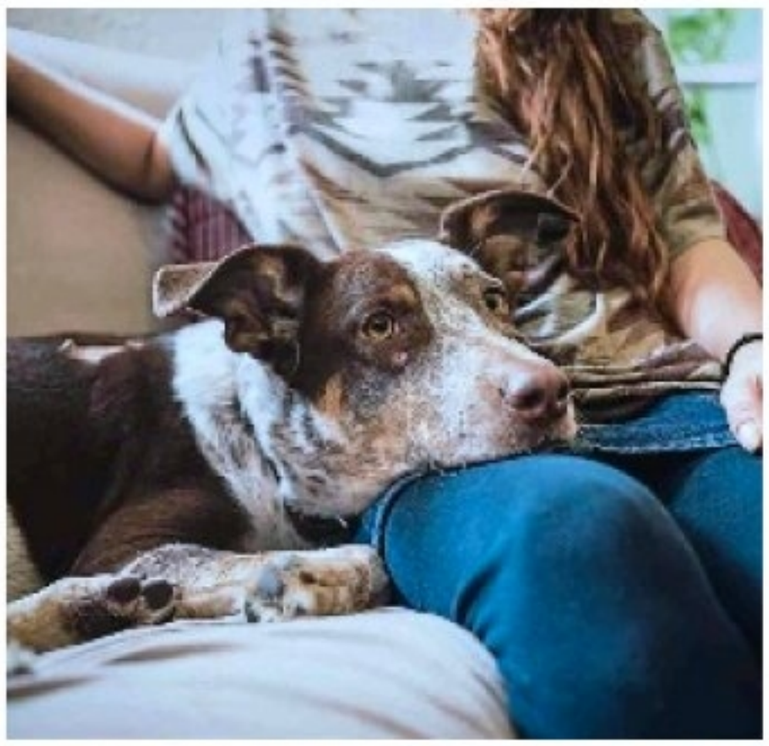
"It's a miracle," Luna's owner, Ayla Reznick, said. "I can't even imagine my life without Luna right now."

Luna slipped her leash while out for a walk in Parkdale. The dog walker tried to pursue her, Reznick said, but the pooch bolted.

Aided by members of the Lost and Found Pets of Ontario Facebook group, Reznick scoured the neighbourhood but didn't find Luna.

Luna eventually returned home on her own, and aside from a few mysterious scrapes and bruises, she was no worse for wear. She was given a clean bill of health from the vet the following day, Reznick said.

It wasn't until later that Reznick learned Luna's brief adventure nearly cost the dog her life.



Ayla Reznick with her dog Luna, who survived after being hit by a GO train in Toronto. EDUARDO LIMA/METRO

A GO train operator named Jonathan Podzyhun reached out to her on Facebook, saying he was on board when the train hit a dog matching Luna's description. He was certain the dog had died.

"He was shocked and amazed that she was alright," Reznick said.

According to Reznick, Podzyhun told her the newer GO trains are a bit higher than older models, which could explain how Luna escaped harm. He also suspected a backpack the dog was wearing might have protected her.

METRO EXPLAINS

What the asbestos ban means

May Warren
Metro | Toronto

On Thursday the federal government announced a plan to ban manufacturing any products containing asbestos, and its import or export by 2018.

Metro breaks down the news and what it means for you.

What is it? Asbestos refers to a group of minerals that, at its peak, was found in more than 3,000 applications.

Why is it dangerous? The World Health Organization declared asbestos a "human carcinogen" way back in 1987. Even small amounts of airborne asbestos fibres can cause lung cancer.

So there's a ban, yay us?

Canada is late to the game on the issue. The government's move comes after decades of lobbying from labour groups, and people who have died or lost loved ones.

What else?

The government pledges to create new health and safety regulations to limit contact workers have with existing asbestos on the job.

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RESEARCH

Global warming's prints on weird weather cases

A new scientific report finds man-made climate change played some role in two dozen extreme weather events last year but not in a few other weird weather instances around the world.

An annual report released Thursday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found climate change was a factor, however small or large, in 24 of 30 strange weather events. They include 11 cases of high heat, as well as unusual winter sunshine in the United Kingdom, Alaskan wildfires and odd "sunny day" flooding in Miami.

The study documented climate change-goosed weather in Alaska, Washington state, the southeastern United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, China, Japan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the western north Pacific cyclone region, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Ethiopia and southern Africa.

"It has to be measurable. It has to be detectable," said NOAA scientist Stephanie Herring, co-editor of the report.

> **It has to be measurable. It has to be detectable.**
> Stephanie Herring

In six cases — including cold snaps in the U.S. and downpours in Nigeria and India — the scientists could not detect climate change's effects. Other scientists, though, disputed that finding for the cold snap that hit the Northeast.

Herring highlighted the Miami flooding in September 2015. Because of rising sea levels and sinking land, extremely high tides flooded the streets with 22 inches of water.

"This one is just very remarkable because truly, not a cloud in the sky, and these types of tidal nuisance flooding events are clearly become more frequent," she said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Syrians who were evacuated from rebel-held neighbourhoods arrive in Khan al-Aassal region, in west Aleppo. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

East Aleppo's residents flee

Evacuation seals the fate of the rebellion's key stronghold

Weeping, hobbling on crutches or dragging suitcases, hundreds of survivors of a devastating government bombardment and siege left the last sliver of opposition-held Aleppo on Thursday, an evacuation that sealed the end of the rebellion's most important stronghold and was a watershed moment in Syria's five-year-old civil war.

A smiling President Bashar Assad called it a historic event comparable to the birth of Christ and the revelation of the Qur'an.

A UN official described it as "a black chapter in the history of international relations."

Under a surrender deal brokered by Russia and Turkey, tens of thousands of residents and rebel fighters are being evacuated to opposition-controlled areas in the surrounding countryside.

Eastern Aleppo rose in revolt against Assad in 2012 and battled since then with the western, government-held part of the city in one of the most horrific and destructive fronts of the civil war.

The rebels' hold in Syria's one-time commercial powerhouse was a major point of pride, and at times it seemed an invulnerable part of what was once a growing opposition-held patch of territory in the north.

But government forces finally surrounded eastern Aleppo and then battered it to pieces. The air and ground campaign by Syrian troops — backed by Russian warplanes and forces from Assad's regional allies — relentlessly wore away at the enclave.

Hundreds of civilians were killed, and tens of thousands fled to government-held areas. The pocket was reduced to a few blocks packed with the bloodied, exhausted and demoralized but also die-hard opposition forces.

"History is being made," an upbeat Assad proclaimed in a video. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VOICES OF THE DISPLACED

As they find safety, displaced residents from the devastated east of the city describe violence and food shortages to the UNHCR.

We had a house, but it was completely destroyed. It was very shocking to see our home turned to ruins. Bader, 12,

I am very scared of what the future might hold for us, and especially for my daughters.
Aziza, a single mother in her late thirties

We used to be given bags of bread, but then bread stopped and there was just rice. Then there was no rice and the prices of food became so expensive.
Mohammad, 16

SOURCE: UNHCR

Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli performs in Budapest, Hungary on Nov. 5. Bocelli has been confirmed as a performer at president-elect Donald Trump's inauguration. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

We ignore dual realities at our peril

Rosemary Westwood relocates from Canada to the U.S. She chronicles her observations in a weekly column for Metro.

For a minute there, it appeared as if the only star president-elect Donald Trump could scrounge up to sing at his inauguration was the runner-up in 2010's America's Got Talent, Jackie Evancho.

Not exactly in keeping with the Trump Hotel motto "Never Settle."

And it felt so right. Who could possibly want to serenade into power the most dangerous president elected in my lifetime? Who could want to sing those myth-making lyrics "land of the free" to a man in favour of voter suppression and media suppression, deporting an entire religion and jailing innocents, a man who takes his leadership cues from Vladimir Putin, who lies to his supporters in order to cement his own power?

The answer, it turns out, is Andrea Bocelli. I'll never hear that duet with Celine Dion the same way again.

It's still a bit gratifying to know that most of Hollywood, whose opinions I care little about otherwise, is MIA on this one.

Of course, Donald Trump's own celebrity has never really translated into widespread celebrity political love. (Aside from Kanye West's less-than-gushing support, Alec, the lesser of the Baldwins, and the actress from Clueless who wasn't Cher or Tai.)

But the lack of Hollywood support certainly didn't bother Trump's base, who seem to view celebrities (minus Trump himself) as de facto "elites" (a term now devoid of meaning, since it also appears to apply to every New Yorker, including nearly half of the city that's living in or near poverty).

Indeed, some might not care who sings about "the rockets' red glare" this time. What looks bad from where I'm sitting, clearly, looks completely different to someone who voted for Trump.

That acceptance comes with a few requirements.

The first is to remember that while I'm rolling my eyes at reports in the Daily Beast that Trump wanted Aretha Franklin to sing for him (Aretha?!), some of Trump's 46 per cent of the U.S. electorate are reading on Breitbart that President Obama's investigation into Russian hacking is just sour grapes after the Democrats lost the election.

There are two American realities, and we ignore the one we're not living in at our own peril.

Which brings us to the other requirement: Anyone outraged at the election results has some studying to do. Go read Fox News. Browse Red State. Click on a few Breitbart links. Even, God forbid, peruse Info Wars.

The day after the election, On The Media's Brooke Gladstone argued the radio show — which reports on the media — has a new goal: "To make what seems to have been invisible to us and everyone we know, visible."

It's a worthy goal for us all.

Women's March set for post-inauguration

Police in Washington said Thursday that they have issued a permit for the Women's March on Washington, a demonstration planned for the day after the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump.

The Metropolitan Police Department said it has issued a permit for the Jan. 21 march to start near the U.S. Capitol. Organizers have said they will march down Independence Avenue, and police said the march is scheduled to disperse at Constitution Avenue near the Washington Monument.

Police said that on their application, march organizers estimated 200,000 participants.

Organizers hoped to rally at the Lincoln Memorial, but those plans conflicted with other events. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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AMVIC

Employee health benefits going to the dogs, and cats

SERVICES

Store looks to make fancy pet food part of company plans

Kristin Matthews and Peter Zakarow, with dog Sawyer, are owners and co-founders of the Tom&Sawyer. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Trish Donnelly has worked under celebrated Toronto chef Jamie Kennedy and helmed trendy spots from Oyster Boy on Queen St. W. to Mildred's Temple Kitchen in Liberty Village.

These days the executive chef with the perfect pedigree is making a dog's breakfast on Queen St. E. — and loving it.

As top chef of the new, high-end and healthy pet food store Tom&Sawyer, she still puts her considerable chops to good use, whipping up restaurant quality dishes like sous vide salmon, tuna with sweet potato and Italian beef pasta for a less lippy, if not more yappy, clientele.

"My friends weren't surprised when they found out. They said, 'Well, you like dogs more than people anyway'," she says with a giggle.

Of course, making gourmet grub in a shiny, open kitchen that looks like something you'd see at a top-notch establishment doesn't come cheap (some meals are priced at $11 a pop.) So owners Kristin Matthews and Peter Zakarow have partnered with digital upstart League to get the fancy food onto some employee benefit plans.

League's digital platform, accessed through an app, provides companies with health spending accounts, lifestyle spending accounts and workplace health services for employees.

"We are aware that pets are a huge part of people's lives — especially for millennials," says League founder and CEO Michael Serbinis.

"This is a driving reason why League is investigating pet-related services and products in our health marketplace," he says, noting he's expecting to see good traction from clients for the offbeat offering.

Most big insurance companies like Sun Life and Manulife offer flexible benefit packages to employees that provide tax-free services such as physiotherapy and massage therapy. Lifestyle or wellness spending accounts also offer workers taxable benefits such as gym memberships and nutritional supplements — but healthy pet food is pretty new to the mix, he says.

There are also plenty of companies, from Hudson's Bay Financial Services to Home Depot, that offer pet insurance for veterinary services, which pet owners know can be very pricey if their pooch or feline gets sick.

"While many companies offer perks such as 'take your dog to work', only a few companies have started to make veterinary coverage available under employee benefit plans," Serbinis says.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

MORTGAGE

New rules to slow debt: Bank of Canada

The Bank of Canada is predicting new mortgage rules will help slow rising household debt levels and the advance of home prices in some markets — two concerns it says pose the biggest risks to the country's financial stability.

The central bank warned Thursday that climbing debt levels, combined with a growing proportion of highly indebted households, have left Canada exposed to economic shocks, such as an event that leads to a significant drop in employment.

But governor Stephen Poloz said he expects stricter housing finance rules introduced in recent months by federal, provincial and municipal authorities to gradually ease household indebtedness and improve the quality of future borrowing.

In October, Ottawa announced changes aimed at curbing rising debt loads and cooling activity in the hot housing markets like Toronto and Vancouver. The new rules made it tougher for prospective borrowers to qualify for mortgages and restricted insurance eligibility for high-ratio mortgages.

"They're pretty well guaranteed to work because they're rules about the qualifying criteria," Poloz said of the measures after the central bank released the latest edition of its semi-annual financial system review.

"Those processes are basically mechanical, but slow because of the large stock (of mortgages)."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook starting to fight fake news

Facebook is taking new measures to curb the spread of fake news on its social network. It will focus on the "worst of the worst" offenders and partner with outside fact-checkers and news organizations to sort honest news from made-up stories that play to people's passions and preconceived notions.

The social network will make it easier for users to report fake news when they see it. If enough people report a story as fake, Facebook will pass it to third-party fact-checking organizations.

Five fact-checking and news organizations are working with Facebook on this: ABC News, The Associated Press, FactCheck.org, Politifact and Snopes.

Stories that flunk the fact check won't be removed from Facebook. But they'll be publicly flagged as "disputed," which will force them to appear lower down in people's news feed. Users can click on a link to learn why that is. And if people decide they want to share the story with friends anyway, they can — but they'll get another warning.

WHY FAKE NEWS MATTERS

Fake political stories have drawn outsized attention because of the possibility that they influenced public perceptions and could have swayed the U.S. presidential election.

There have been dangerous real-world consequences. A fake story about a child sex ring at a Washington, D.C., pizza joint prompted a man to fire an assault rifle inside the restaurant.

Fake news stories can be quicker to go viral than news stories from traditional sources. That's because they were created for sharing — they are clickable, often inflammatory and pander to emotional responses.

FACEBOOK AND FAKE NEWS

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has said that fake news constitutes less than one per cent of what's on Facebook, but critics say that's wildly misleading. For a site with nearly two billion users tapping out posts by the millisecond, even one per cent is a huge number, especially since the total includes everything that's posted on Facebook — photos, videos and daily updates in addition to news articles.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

The social network's first public step toward fixing the fake-news problem since the election was a statement barring fake-news sites from using its lucrative ad network. But it wasn't much more than rhetorical. Facebook's policies already blocked sites that spread misleading information from its ad network, an automated system that places ads on sites across the internet.

Now, Facebook says it has also eliminated the ability for spammers to masquerade as real news organizations by spoofing domains.

ROBOTS VS. FALSEHOOD

Facebook's main approach to problems has been to tackle them with studying its vast troves of user data, with algorithms that can be more effective at things than humans, and to favour engineers over editors.

Beyond the human fact-checkers, Facebook is also using its algorithms to de-emphasize fake news stories.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NOTICE OF ACTION

TO: QIANG ZHAO, CALGARY, ALBERTA

TAKE NOTICE THAT The Plaintiff's solicitor Martin G. Schulz of Martin G. Schulz and Associates in Calgary, Alberta has filed a Notice of Withdrawal of Lawyer of Record with respect to a Statement of Claim (numbered 1401-05244) in the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta in the Law Courts of Calgary, Alberta filed on May 12, 2014, in which you are named as a Plaintiff.

The solicitor Martin G. Schulz of Martin G. Schulz and Associates has made multiple attempts to contact you by telephone, as well as searching for you on social media sites. On September 27th, 2016 we made an attempt to contact you by sending out a letter to the last known address of 1003, 116 – 3 Avenue S.E., Calgary, Alberta T2G 5A9. All attempts to contact you have been unsuccessful.

You have "10" DAYS from the date of the publication of this advertisement.

The Plaintiff has obtained an Order from the Court of Queen's Bench in Calgary, Alberta, allowing them to serve you by way of posting this Notice of Action in a local Calgary newspaper.

NOTICE OF HEARING FOR PERMANENT GUARDIANSHIP ORDER TO:

Maureen Methot

Take notice that on the **28th day of March 2017 at 10:45 a.m., at Calgary Family Court, Courtroom # 821, 601 – 5th Street SW, Calgary, Alberta**, a Judicial Dispute Resolution hearing will take place.

Take notice that on the **29th day of March 2017 at 9:30 a.m., at Calgary Family Court, Courtroom # 1205, 601 – 5th Street SW, Calgary, Alberta**, a hearing will take place.

Take notice that on the **10th day of July 2017 at 2:00 p.m., at Calgary Family Court, Courtroom # 303, 601 – 5th Street SW, Calgary, Alberta**, a Pre-Trial Conference will take place.

Take notice that on the **14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th days of August 2017 at 9:30 a.m., at Calgary Family Court, Courtroom # 302, 601 – 5th Street SW, Calgary, Alberta**, a Trial will take place.

A Director, under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act will make an application for: **Permanent Guardianship Order;** of your children born on **June 16, 2007** and **August 17, 2009**. If you wish to speak to this matter in court, you MUST appear in court on this date. You do have the right to be represented by a lawyer. If you do not attend in person or by a lawyer, an Order may be made in your absence and the Judge may make a different Order than the one being applied for by the Director. You will be bound by any Order the Judge makes.

You do have the right to appeal the Order within 30 days from the date the Order is made.

Contact: Jackie Ellice; Leanne Baines; Daniella Eggink
Calgary Region, Child and Family Services
Phone: (403) 297-2978

metro SCIENCE

Your essential daily news

No bones about it: Evolutionary biologists believe humans lack the penis bone our direct ancestors have because we spend less time having sex

DECODED by Genna Buck and Andrés Plana

DINOSAURS REALLY DID HAVE FEATHERS

A Chinese scientist browsing a market in Myanmar has stumbled onto **the find of the century.** What first appeared to be a fragment of a bird's tail suspended in 99-million-year old amber in fact belongs to a coelurosaur — a feathered, sparrow-sized dinosaur. **But what is amber and where does it get its enchanting ability to capture an ancient moment and freeze it in time?**

Amber starts out as sticky tree resin. Over many years, a series of chemical reactions turns hardened resin into glassy amber. Smelly, reactive chemicals, called volatiles, dissipate, and the rings of hydrogen and carbon that remain arrange themselves into long chains of molecules called polymers. Once the volatiles are gone and the **polymerization** is complete, the resin, sometimes with debris or dead critters trapped inside, is amber.

Fair feather find

Using microscopes and a CT scanner, scientists at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum were the first to ever see dinosaur feathers in glorious 3D. They're white and brown, and more delicately structured than modern bird feathers, lacking the strong central rod.

As a result, this dino probably couldn't fly: a clue feathers may have first evolved for a purpose other than flight. Unlike in birds, the tail's **vertebrae were not fused into one bone,** but segmented and able to bend in several places at once.

Who was this dinosaur?

A pocket-sized member of the T. rex's family, **coelurosauria**. It walked upright and feasted on insects.

Sorry, Jurassic Park fans, scientists are pretty sure **dino DNA can't survive in amber**. Earlier experiments that suggested this was possible seem to have picked up stray DNA from the lab.

FINDINGS
Your week in science

SUMUKHA J. N.

MAGIC MENAGERIE
Scientists have been known to give goofy names to genes (sonic hedgehog) and animals (Pieza kake). Now J.K. Rowling has given her seal of approval to another silly-sounding species: Eriovixia gryffindori, a spider that looks remarkably like the Hogwarts sorting hat.

SAD ZIKA STUDY
The most detailed study yet of pregnant women in Brazil with confirmed Zika virus has revealed a scary truth: more than half had a miscarriage, stillbirth, or baby with a devastating brain abnormality.

SOUND SMART

NOMEN CLATURE

DEFINITION
Nomenclature is a scientific system for naming and categorizing something, like chemical compounds, animals or time periods. Biologists use binomial nomenclature (genus and species in italics) for living things like *Homo sapiens*.

USE IT IN A SENTENCE
The international community should adopt formal **nomenclature** for Pokemon. Their names are cutesy and random; they don't provide any useful information.

CITIZEN SCIENTIST by Genna Buck

Why doesn't the sun fry the earth?

The sun injects a lot of energy into Earth, yet the temperature here is relatively stable. The Earth must be losing a similar amount of heat. How does that work? — Dexter

You're right. The Earth absorbs radiation from the sun and releases a similar amount out into space. But not exactly the same amount. And that's a problem.

Solar energy is constantly being soaked up and spat back out by the land and oceans. Some is reflected by clouds and bright surfaces like polar ice caps, and some is absorbed by the cosy blanket of **greenhouse gases** that surrounds our planet. They keep the atmosphere at an average of 14 C, warmer than it otherwise would be (-18 C, the temperature on the atmosphere-less moon).

All in all, our planet exists in a state of **energy balance**. I think of it as a bathtub with the plug pulled and the tap on: We experience a consistent, comfortable temperature level because solar energy is pouring in and draining out at the same rate. At least, that's what's supposed to happen.

You may have heard something about how we're pouring more and more greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane into the air by burning fossil fuels and raising animals.

These gases have atoms are loosely bound together, and when they heat up, they vibrate and move around. They release the energy as heat, which other greenhouse gases absorb. This continuous process of passing heat back and forth between molecules keeps more of the sun's energy close to the Earth, with familiar consequences: Rising mercury, rising oceans, and doomsday if we don't do anything about it.

This process, **the greenhouse effect**, is also the reason the ocean isn't frozen. It sure is harder to deny something is real when you learn the details of how it works.

Science Question?
Tweet @genna_buck

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IN FOCUS

A long time ago, in a galaxy not too far away, we were all wowed

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

February 3, 1959 and February 9, 1964. The day the music died and the date it was reborn on the Ed Sullivan Show, both days burned into the collective memories of pop culture fanatics everywhere.

But what about May 25, 1977?

If you were a teenager then chances are you felt the earth shift. It was the day Star Wars opened, kicking off a cultural phenomenon that continues to this day.

This weekend the universe George Lucas unleashed in 1977 grows to include Rogue One: A Star Wars Story. Much-anticipated, the movie is the first of the standalone Star Wars Anthology films and is expected to decimate the competition, Death Star style.

Expect line-ups and packed theatres — box office seers estimate it could pull in somewhere between $130 million to $150 million at the U.S. box office this week — but no matter how wild the weekend gets, nothing will match the pandemonium that greeted Star Wars in May, 1977.

To paint a picture of the first blush of Star Wars mania I asked my Facebookers what they remember about that moment a long time ago, in a galaxy (not so) far, far away...

"I remember being so in awe of that legendary opening scene with the giant spaceship coming into picture from the top and filling up the entire screen… oooo, aaaaah," wrote Glenda Fordham. "The audience gasped in unison."

"Upon leaving the theatre, with my little mind totally blown, I was interviewed by the news," recollected Lesley Mitchell-Clarke, "where I think that I said, 'Anything is now possible cinematically.' I was all of 19."

"My stepbrother, who was seven at the time, was dead set against seeing it," says Tina Cooper, "and then of course saw it at least 50 times and dressed in Star Wars gear and played with Star Wars toys every single day for the rest of his childhood."

"The line-up went right around the block and we ended up sitting in the front row of the balcony," recalled Chris Ball "I was mesmerized but dad was bored. Part way through I guess he decided he might as well get comfortable. He took his jacket off and in the process knocked his popcorn over the balcony railing. We got a stern lecture from the manager and almost got thrown out. Fast forward 20 years (1997) and I am now the manager of the same theatre and handing out those stern lectures."

"I was six," remembered Sue Edworthy. "My Dad took me to see it. I fell asleep halfway through. He took me to see it again. I fell asleep halfway through. The seventh time, I finally saw the whole thing. Clearly he had no problem seeing it again, and again, and again."

"It was the first film that I went to more than once in its initial run," said Adrian Gruff. "In the scene where the X-Wings enter the Death Star's trench, I disengaged from the screen just so I could watch everyone's heads do the sideways bob and twist that mine had done on first viewing.

"It was the first time that I had a true inkling as to the energy that religion refers to as 'God.'"

MOVIE RATINGS by Richard Crouse

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story	★★★★
Collateral Beauty	★

HOW RATING WORKS	
★★★★	SEE IT
★★★	WORTHWHILE
★★	UP TO YOU
★	SKIP IT

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story will give another new generation that trademark thrill of facing up to the Force for the very first time. CONTRIBUTED

The galaxy's new recruit

In Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, British-Pakistani actor Riz Ahmed plays Bodhi Rook, a former Imperial pilot who takes his technical skills across to the Rebel Alliance. CONTRIBUTED

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INTERVIEW

Riz Ahmed says he was a troublemaker on Star Wars set

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

Like a lot of kids Riz Ahmed liked Star Wars. Unlike most kids he grew up to be part of the franchise, playing pilot Bodhi Rook in Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.

"I was a fan," says Ahmed, also known as Riz MC, who earlier this year starred in HBO's The Night Of. "I remember watching the films the first time round with my older brother. I was about six or seven years old. They were kind of my only memory of watching any movie at all. They left a massive impact on me. I remember running around with my brother for years, acting out our own weird sci-fi stories. Even though I didn't understand the storyline – I was too young – the level of imagination and detail that went into those movies.... It made an impression."

Yet, while the originals left an impression on the younger Ahmed, it was only when he joined the universe himself that he realized his level of fandom might not have been quite at the level he had thought.

"It's only now that I have met real Star Wars fans that I realize I wasn't really a fan," he says. "I thought I was. Star Wars fans are dedicated, loyal fans. I think the kind of vibe I've gotten so far is that they are really excited to see a film that both preserves the legacy and the inheritance of the Star Wars saga but is also something a little different, fresh, distinctive and separate from the other films. I think that can be a really tricky balance to achieve but I think they have really done that. "

Rogue One is the first standalone Star Wars Anthology film — upcoming movies in the expanded cinematic universe will focus on Han Solo and Boba Fett — and takes place after the formation of the Galactic Empire, shortly before the events of Episode IV: A New Hope.

The Rebel Alliance has recruited former criminal Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones) to collaborate with a team to retrieve the blueprints of the Death Star, the Empire's armoured battle station capable of destroying entire planets.

Ahmed plays a recruit, a former Imperial pilot with strong technical skills. Producer Kathleen Kennedy calls the character "a troublemaker."

> **It's only now that I have met real Star Wars fans that I realize I wasn't really a fan.**
> Riz Ahmed

"It is interesting she calls Bodhi Rook a troublemaker," Ahmed laughs. "I sometimes wonder if she is talking about me on the film set. Bodhi is somebody who is thrust into a really unfamiliar set of circumstances. He is just an Imperial cargo pilot, an average Joe trying to earn a living. It is a company town he lives in, the occupied planet of Jedha, so he works for the Empire. He's really thrust into a new set of circumstances that force him to reconsider his allegiances and what he's doing in these turbulent times."

Working beside Ahmed are Diego Luna, Donnie Yen and Forest Whitaker, making Rogue One the most diverse of all the Star Wars films.

"I think it just makes sense that our film reflects the society around us," says the British Pakistani actor, "and also the audience watching the films. A story like Star Wars is a global story. It belongs to all of us.

"Audiences around the world are excited about Star Wars so it makes sense that when they think about who might be the best actors for these roles they cast their net really wide all around the world. 'Yeah, we'll have Ben Mendelsohn from Australia, Forest Whittaker from L.A. and Mads Mikkelsen from over here.' I'm lucky to have been caught up in this net as well."

Rising stars from across the planet

Star Wars has always had a wide variety of faces in its films, but, besides a few outliers, the diversity was mainly limited to that of the various creatures inhabiting the planets. Rogue One really bursts through the arbitrary barrier with director Gareth Edwards using a large international cast, including Mexican, Danish, British-Pakistani, Chinese, Australian, African-American and British performers. Meet a few of the new faces: THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DIEGO LUNA AND ALAN TUDYK

The rebellion's cop team — one man and his droid

Mexican actor Diego Luna wanted so badly to be in a Star Wars film, he said he would have paid to be part of it. He plays Cassian, an intelligence officer for the rebellion, or, a spy charged with leading the dangerous mission that culminates in the rebels stealing the plans for the Death Star. "He's a very lonely character. His best friend is a droid basically — that says a lot about him — and a droid that he reprogrammed!" Luna said. That droid is K-2SO (above with Luna either side of Felicity Jones' heroine Jyn Erso), voiced by American Alan Tudyk, hailed as one of the breakouts of the film for his deadpan humour. "I'd like to think that we're a team. Kind of like a cop team, and I'm the smart-ass cop!"' said Tudyk.

BEN MENDELSOHN AND MADS MIKKELSEN

Death Star's darkest duo

Aussie Ben Mendelsohn's Orson Krennic is the baddie of the group, the one in charge of making sure the Death Star works. Mads Mikkelsen's Galen Erso is a scientist who tried to leave the killer-making ways behind, only to be drawn back in. "As a scientist you have morals but you just dive into a project that will consume you and before it's too late you realize what you're creating," Denmark's Mikkelsen said.

DONNIE YEN AND JIANG WEN

Chinese actors break barriers

Edwards, inspired by George Lucas's love of Akira Kurosawa's The Hidden Fortress, wanted to have two actors who would squabble but still venture out together on a mission. It resulted in Donnie Yen's blind "warrior monk" Chirrut and Jiang Wen's always heavily armed Baze Malbus. "I realized, 'This is something very special. I'm going to make history,"' Yen said. "'Hey, I'm the first Chinese actor in the Star Wars universe.' That is so rewarding."

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The making of a female serial killer

FILM

The Eyes of my Mother is about an evil woman with good intent

Chris Alexander
For Metro Canada

The Eyes of my Mother actress Kika Magalhaes says she went a little bit crazy preparing for the role. HANDOUT

Ever since Roman Polanski trapped Catherine Deneuve in a Paris apartment and watched her lose her mind in 1965's Repulsion, horror cinema has had an enduring infatuation with the psychotic woman.

There's something unsettling about this dynamic, taking our hard-wired societal perceptions of femininity and twisting them, making them unstable and often evil.

Director Nicolas Pesce's alarming black and white psychodrama The Eyes of my Mother is another in this unending line of crazy-lady shockers, and it's also one of the best films of 2016.

Charting the damaged upbringing of an upstate New York farm girl named Francisca and her even more broken and lethal adult life, the film stars newcomer Kika Magalhaes in a bravura yet muted performance.

Magalhaes is even more impressive because no matter Francisca's transgressions, she manages to make the character sympathetic and someone we — against our better judgement — deeply care about.

"I never saw her as serial killer," Magalhaes told Metro on the cusp of the film's limited release this Friday.

"I saw her as loving. All the horrific acts she commits come from a deep need for affection. She doesn't know how to express love because she was never shown this. She can't bear to see people leave her and I think that she thinks that she's always doing the right thing. It's not as simple as just good and evil."

The Eyes of my Mother does see Francisca committing murder and worse in order to sate her illness, but the film is not exploitation, nor does it revel in a high body count and gratuitous bloodshed. Still, no child should be let near the movie as it's about as dark and depressing as the genre gets. Credit Pesce and Magalhaes' close collaboration during pre-production on ensuring that Francisca is a fully fleshed out female, not just some nickel and dime boogeyman.

> **All the horrific acts she commits come from a deep need for affection.**
> Actress Kika Magalhaes

"I was on board when the film was just an idea," the actress explains.

"Nick and I talked and developed the character together. And the script changed so much from the beginning to where it ended up. Originally, it was all killing, killing and more killing. Then, we had a religious allegory driving it and then it just became her story. Nicolas made sure I watched all the key Hitchcock films, Under the Skin, the Lars von Trier movies and then I researched serial killers like Ted Bundy and maniacs like Charles Manson. To be honest, I felt like I was going a bit crazy myself during the process!"

Since its divisive premiere at Sundance earlier this year ("at least 30 people walked out," Magalhaes says), The Eyes of my Mother has gone on to festival success and great acclaim and was just released theatrically in the U.S. last week. But because it was Magalhaes' first feature film and because she was so creatively involved, the actress is genuinely concerned that she has been spoiled by such a wonderful first cinematic dance partner.

"I've been getting offers and am working a lot on other projects. But it's a problem. I keep trying to offer my ideas while we work and, well, it's just not the same. It's very frustrating, in fact."

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Heard told Coast clear for her dogs

QUARANTINE

Actress returns to Australia for Aquaman role despite pet row

Actress Amber Heard appears set to return to Australia's Gold Coast to star in the DC Comics blockbuster movie Aquaman a year after she was convicted in the same tourist town of smuggling her pet Yorkshire terriers Pistol and Boo into the country.

The movie, which will also feature Game of Thrones television star Jason Momoa in the lead role, will be shot next year at Village Roadshow Studios near Gold Coast city in a deal that will cost the Australian government 22 million Australian dollars ($16 million), Treasurer Scott Morrison said Thursday.

Heard, 30, pleaded guilty in a Gold Coast court in April to falsifying an immigration document to conceal the dogs when she and her then husband Johnny Depp flew into Australia in 2014 for the filming of the latest Pirates of the Caribbean movie in which Depp played pirate Jack Sparrow.

She avoided jail under a deal that included Heard and Depp videoing an awkward public warning against others breaking Australia's strict quarantine laws.

Morrison said Thursday that a "miniature motor home" would be provided for Pistol and Boo if Heard decided to bring them back through the proper quarantine channels.

"We will have a home for them if Amber would like to bring them on to the film set," Morrison told reporters.

The scandal over the dogs was lampooned as Australia's "war on terriers" and unleashed personal hostility between Depp and Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce.

Joyce, who is now Australia's deputy prime minister, prompted countless parodies by stating: "It's time that Pistol and Boo buggered off back to the U.S.." He then warned that the dogs would be euthanized if they didn't flee the country within 72 hours, which they did with only a few hours to spare.

Depp quipped that ruddy-faced Joyce appeared to be "inbred with a tomato" and voiced fears that "he might explode."

Morrison said on Thursday that he was not concerned by how Joyce might react to Pistol and Boo returning.

"No, everyone knows the rules. Those rules apply to everybody as they did last time," Morrison said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"We will have a home for them if Amber would like to bring them on to the film set. Australian Treasurer Scott Morrison will welcome Amber Heard's dogs

Amber Heard and then husband Johnny Depp landed in hot water in Australia in 2014. AP FILE

Debutant Terrell finds his most powerful voice

INTERVIEW

Cast as Obama in first feature, young actor strikes a chord

As he prepared to play a young Barack Obama on the big screen, Devon Terrell shed his Australian accent, altered his body language and started practising his part on strangers he met on the streets of New York City.

Barry, which premieres on Netflix on Friday, examines the life of the U.S. president back when he was still a confused student in his junior year at Columbia University.

"I would go onto the streets and practise it. It was that thing of just getting out of your comfort zone," said Terrell, who at the time had never appeared in a feature film.

"If I could do it to a stranger and they could believe me, then I'm sure I could do it on set with an actor."

Terrell said he was struck by how relatable Obama was in the film's script.

"We weren't trying to just throw something in your face and say 'this used to be the president.' It just felt like if you take out the name Barack Obama, it could have been anybody," he said.

Terrell's co-star, Anya Taylor-Joy, plays a white woman Obama starts dating from his political science class.

For Taylor-Joy, the film tells a universal story, despite its high-profile protagonist.

"I think everyone can connect to it," she said. "I hope people leave feeling a little bit less alone, a little bit like, 'Oh, so the most powerful man in the world felt the way that I felt, that I didn't belong and I couldn't find my scene.'"

That idea of being able to relate to a sitting president also appealed to film director Vikram Gandhi.

"When you're 20 years old and you go to New York for the first time, it's like everybody is a blank slate that is learning from that experience, and everybody at that time in their life is really trying to figure out who they are," he said. "Also all the ideas about race that are happening in it are still extremely relevant right now."

The film sees the young mixed-race Obama struggle to find his place in society, whether it's at a Harlem house party or at a country club wedding. That period of time in his life turned out to be an important one, Gandhi said.

"This was a time where the birth of his consciousness is happening in college, after which he would decide he had a responsibility to African American culture and work in communities," he said.

The film had a personal connection for Gandhi, who happened to also attend Columbia and live in the same neighbourhood Obama did in university.

"It was a time in my life where I was just trying to figure out a lot of things but because I lived on that block I just knew, well that's the bodega that's on the block," Gandhi said.

"It's a time when it was clear he was confronted with so many different options and there were so many different directions he could have gone in and I had the same experience. It felt natural that this was a story I could tell."

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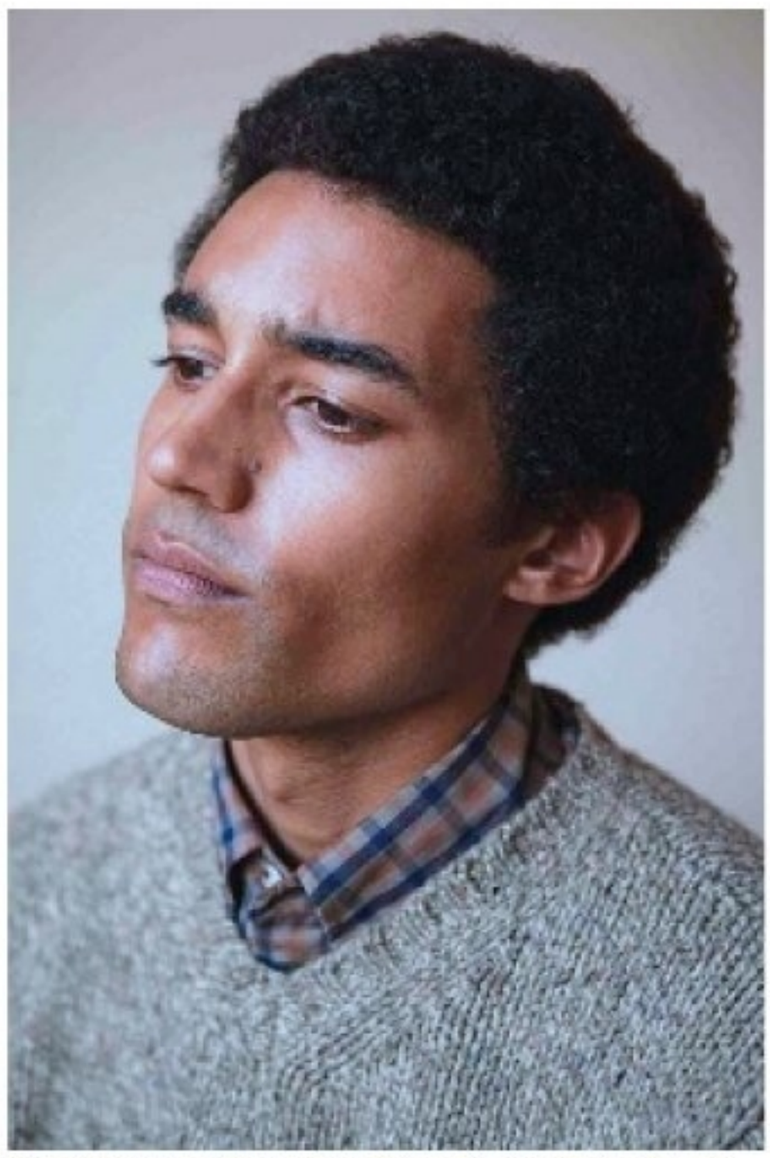

Australian rookie Devon Terrell and director Vikram Gandhi (inset) both found relatable ground in Barry, Netflix's Barack Obama biopic. CONTRIBUTED/CHRISTOPHER SMITH/AP

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Drama touches death, love and grief

FILM DEVELOPMENT

Star-studded cast opened up script to improvement

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

Collateral Beauty had a long Hollywood history before director David Frankel came on board. Hugh Jackman was attached at one point and Rachel McAdams had been approached to play a part.

The long development came to an end when Will Smith signed on to play Howard Inlet, a charismatic advertising kingpin who becomes despondent after the death of his six-year-old daughter.

"When I came on it, it felt like it was written in stone," says Frankel. "Everybody loved the screenplay and we were going in three months and then people started whispering, 'I wish we could fix that.' So it turned out to be a pretty normal development process where we tried a lot of stuff.

"Once the actors got involved, Professor Will Smith, Professor Edward Norton and Professor Kate Winslet, there was a lot more writing. Mostly condensing. Edward had this brilliant vision of the movie as a screwball comedy, which I think was really smart. Will always said, 'We have to make the first half of the movie as funny as possible so that we don't kill people.' We worked on that."

The changes continued into the shooting. In the story Howard spends his nights practising self-therapy, writing angry letters to the abstractions of Time, Love and Death demanding answers as to why his child was taken. In the original script he met the abstractions, personified by Jacob Latimore, Keira Knightley and Helen Mirren, in a different order than in the finished film.

"It was written where he first ran into Love, then Time then Death," says Frankel. "We shot them in the order, Death, Time, Love so as we were approaching Love Will and I were still arguing about whether Love should be first or last in the sequence.

"We had prepped for six months up to that moment thinking Love was first. He came to me the day before and said, 'I think Love should be last.' I fought him tooth and nail about it because I really thought that moment on the train when he confronts Death was the pivotal moment and then it rained and because of the weather (the shots) wouldn't have matched. The sequence wouldn't have made sense.

Edward Norton, director David Frankel and Will Smith behind the scenes on the set of drama Collateral Beauty, from New Line Cinemas, Village Roadshow Pictures and Warner Bros. Pictures. BARRY WETCHER

> **Of course Will said, 'God works in mysterious ways.' But Will Smith got his way. Big surprise.**
> David Frankel

"Of course Will said, 'God works in mysterious ways.' But Will Smith got his way. Big surprise."

The movie details the anguish Howard feels and the steps his friends take to help him reconnect with the world.

"I have seen some pretty profound grief," says Frankel. "My wife lost her mom six years ago and grief really can distort someone's connection to the universe. I learned you don't just get over it. That's why the line Helen (Mirren) has, I think is the most profound line in the movie. 'Nothing is really ever dead if you look at it right.'

"That I thought was really beautiful. That is how we all live on, in memory, not in fact."

It may seem like an odd subject for a Christmas film but Frankel says, "In holiday movies you always want a sense of hope. That's ultimately what we dreamed of for this movie.

"I know when Will saw it for the first time he ran to hug Willow who was in the audience with him. People want to connect and realize the fragility of our time here."

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Smith channels grief for latest role

COLLATERAL BEAUTY

Actor struck with news of father's illness ahead of filming

Will Smith had already begun researching his role for Collateral Beauty when he learned that his father was terminally ill.

Smith said at the film's world premiere in New York on Monday that he had to channel the emotions of that tragic news into a demanding film role. Smith's father, Willard Carroll Smith Jr., died on Nov. 7.

"My father was diagnosed and given six weeks, so you know, to be hit with that in the process and then what we decided to do was just use the preparation of the character to actually deal with what my father was experiencing," Smith said. "It became our way of saying goodbye, essentially. It was a really beautiful confluence of art and life."

Smith stars in the film as a father who suffers a great tragedy and begins to question the point of existence.

"It is such a beautiful concept. It's a guy that experiences a loss and gets furious at the universe, and writes these letters to Love, Time and Death, and his mind is so twisted that he mails the letters. And then, Love, Time and Death respond. You know, it's that beautiful Christmas twist to it, but dealing with real issues," Smith said.

The film also stars Helen Mirren in the role of Death. She admitted to loving the script, and felt it shared the same vibe as Christmas classics like It's a Wonderful Life and A Christmas Carol.

"There was something very, very true in the centre of it. And kind of as a Christmas movie, you know it's kind of a pretty cool Christmas gift of a movie," Mirren said.

Edward Norton, who plays Smith's best friend and partner in the film, also said he saw a strong similarity with the film to holiday classics like It's a Wonderful Life.

"They straddle this very difficult balance between, obviously being very heart-winning and heart-warming and hopeful. But if you think about it, they touch on very dark and difficult things. Jimmy Stewart is in such despair he's going to a bridge to jump, right? But somehow they manage to be about deep and important things, while also being a lot of fun," Norton said.

> **It became our way of saying goodbye, essentially. It was a really beautiful confluence of art and life.** Will Smith on losing his father

Will Smith as Howard and Jacob Latimore as Raffi in Collateral Beauty. CONTRIBUTED

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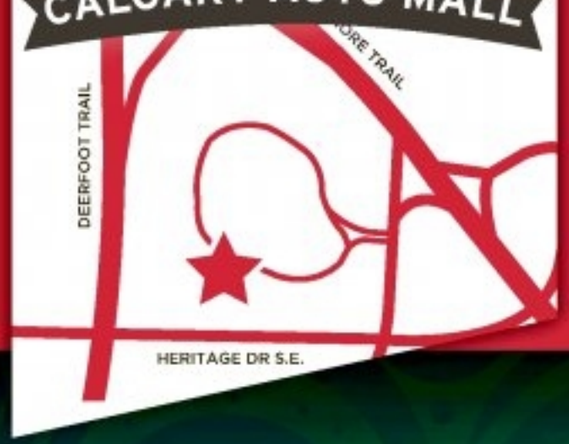

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WHAT TO BUY FOR THE ULTIMATE FILM BUFF THIS FESTIVE SEASON

Buying that perfect gift for a film buff can be a vexing task, so we went right to the heart of Hollywood to get tips on the creative ways in which some directors and stars might enchant a fellow movie lover this holiday season. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Damien Chazelle

The Whiplash and La La Land director reached back to his own filmmaking roots and recommended a Bolex camera, like the kind he used to make movies on. "To me, that's about returning to the basics. You just put a camera on your shoulder, you go out on the street, there's no sound, you just film whatever you see," Chazelle said. "love the old fashioned, rusty old cameras. Maybe no one else does but I'd give them that." Vintage Bolex cameras can run around $400 on eBay.

Gugu Mbatha-Raw

In honour of its 70th anniversary, the Miss Sloane star said she'd go with Frank Capra's It's a Wonderful Life.

"For me, for Christmas, that's just the ultimate to be able to watch that movie. It's so uplifting. That would be my gift," she said. "It's so beautiful, it's such a classic and as I say, it's really an inspiring story about family. I think it's lovely." The 60th Anniversary edition is available on DVD for $17.85.

Alden Ehrenreich and Lily Collins

Rules Don't Apply star Alden Eherenreich, who has a passion for all things old Hollywood, said he'd buy George Stevens, Jr.'s Conversations with the Great Moviemakers of Hollywood's Golden Age and its companion book The Next Generation. Co-star Collins said she likes physical gifts that can double as art. "I have a collection of vintage film cameras and old film strips and reels and I've given them as gifts if I find a really hard to find, rare one," she said.

Pablo Larrain

It might not be the easiest on the list, but the Jackie director said his ideal gift for someone would be to arrange a screening of a silent movie with a full orchestra. "I saw Metropolis like that," he said. "It was awesome."

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BOOK PUBLISHERS

Trump the author petitioned

Authors and First Amendment advocates have been lamenting the election of Donald Trump, but the book industry's trade group believes it can do business with his administration.

In a five-page letter to the Republican president-elect, the Association of American Publishers outlined its views Thursday on copyright, entrepreneurship and other issues.

One reason for the association's optimism: Trump himself has published many books and may relate to the industry's concerns about piracy and internet theft. The protection of "novice as well as celebrated authors" is at the core of the industry's mission, according to the association, which noted that Trump has thrived publishing books through such association members as Simon & Schuster and Random House.

"This is not industry puffery, Mr. President-elect," the letter reads. "Undoubtedly, your most recent books introduced readers to views and ideas that formed the core of your election campaign."

"This is not industry puffery, Mr. President-elect. Undoubtedly, your most recent books introduced readers to views and ideas that formed the core of your election campaign."
Association of American Publishers

Publishers also believe Trump will be sympathetic to the protection of intellectual property rights. The letter notes that Trump himself has developed an international brand that's been made possible "through trademark representation and enforcement."

"Your businesses have been active at the U.S. Trademark Office and in the courts when necessary to exercise your statuary rights to prevent infringement or dilution of your brand."

Individual publishers may feel more comfortable politically with Democratic President Barack Obama, but his administration didn't always align with the industry, notably on antitrust and Amazon.com. In 2012, the Department of Justice sued Apple and five leading publishers for the alleged fixing of ebook prices.

The legal action followed Apple's launching of its iBookstore and a new pricing system that allowed publishers to set the cost of ebooks.

Publishers feared that Amazon, which has long dominated the ebook market, was charging too little and driving down the value of books.

The five companies ended up settling out of court and a federal judge ruled against Apple.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

It's been a crazy few days: El Moussa

TELEVISION

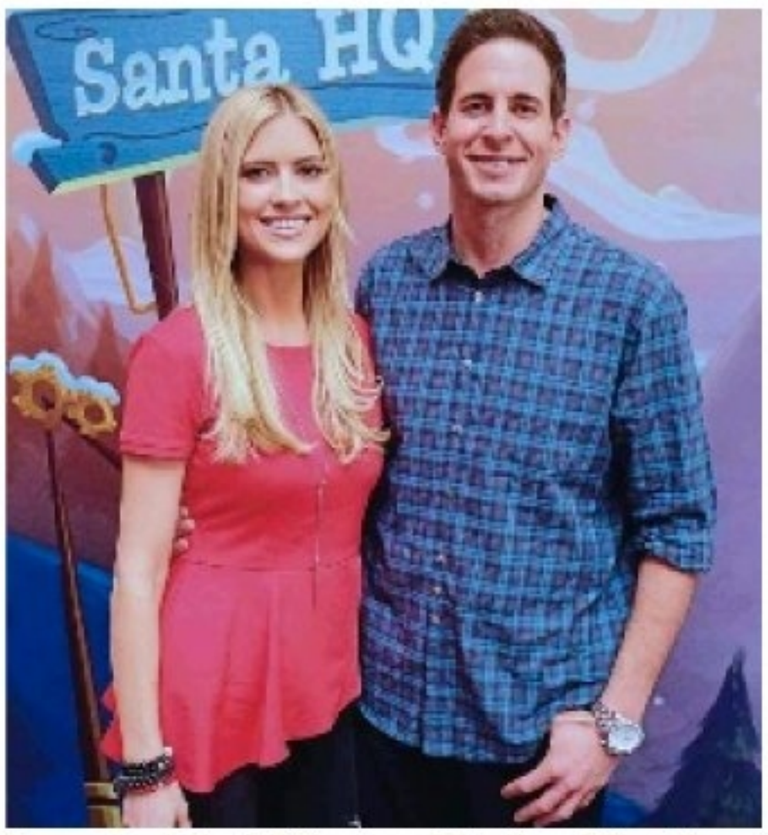
HGTV host opens up after split from wife and co-host

HGTV's Tarek El Moussa has opened up days after he and his wife and Flip or Flop co-host Christina El Moussa announced their separation.

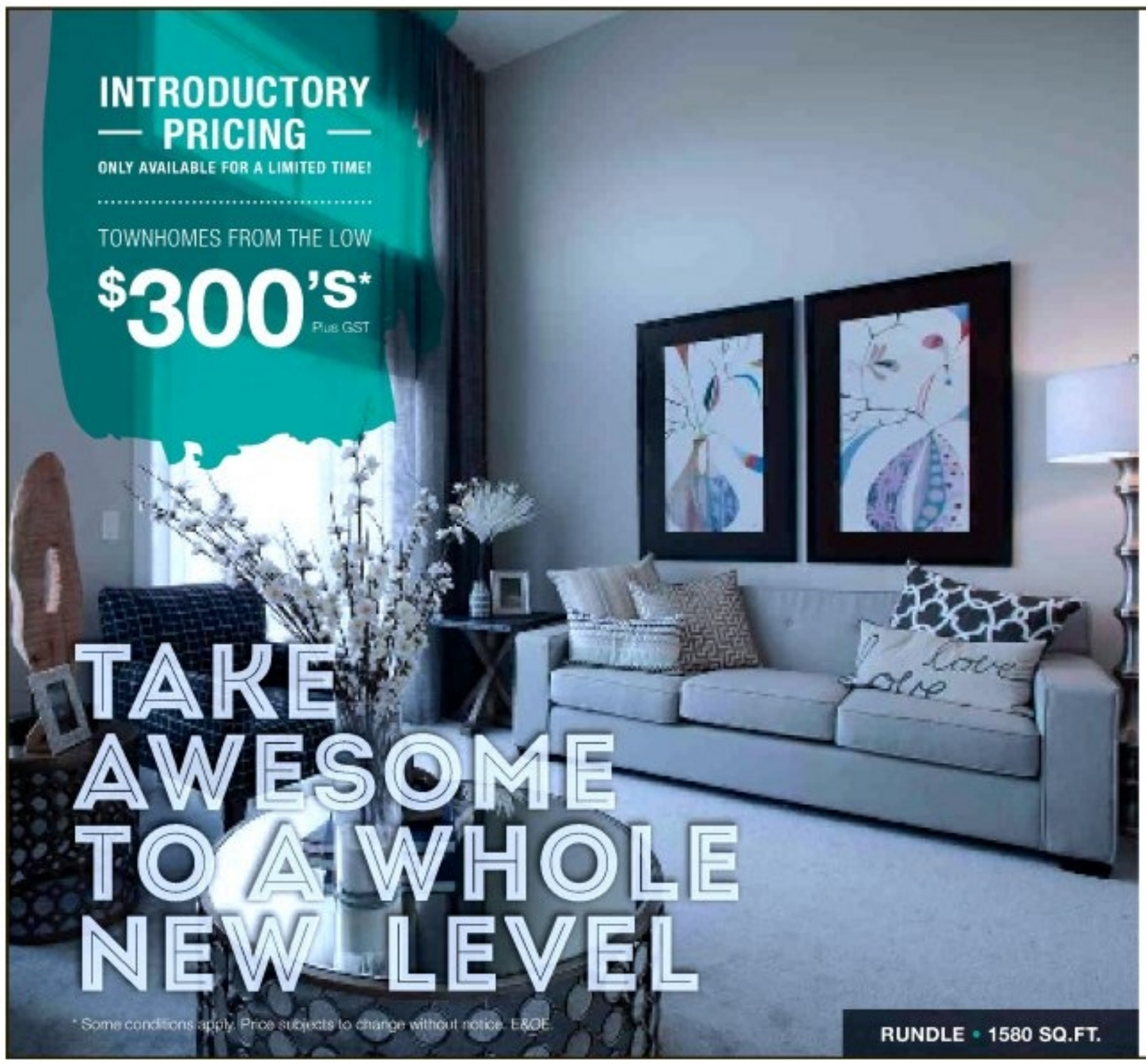
Tarek El Moussa posted a picture of himself and his daughter on Instagram on Wednesday night. He wrote, "It's been a crazy few days but we love our kids so much!!"

The former couple told People magazine that they have dated other people amid the split. On Monday, the El Moussas announced that they were separating six months after law enforcement was called to their California home. The sheriff's office says they found Tarek El Moussa walking with a gun in a park near the home.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Former couple Tarek El Moussa and his wife and Flip or Flop co-host Christina El Moussa told People magazine in a story published Wednesday that they have dated other people amid the split. JEROD HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES FOR LAKEWOOD CENTER



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INSTA-NOUNCEMENT **LOCHTE AND FIANCEE EXPECTING**
Ryan Lochte has jumped in the pool to announce that he and fiancee Kayla Rae Reid are expecting a baby. The controversial Olympic swimmer and the former Playboy model shared pictures on Instagram of Lochte under water kissing Reid's tiny baby bump. Lochte says his "Christmas gift came early this year." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS;INSTAGRAM/@RYANLOCHTE

ROYAL FAMILY

Harry steps out with Toronto actress

Prince Harry and girlfriend Meghan Markle have been photographed together for the first time, walking hand-in-hand on a busy London street on their way to a show.

The Sun newspaper reports they attended The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime at the Gielgud Theatre in the West End on Wednesday.

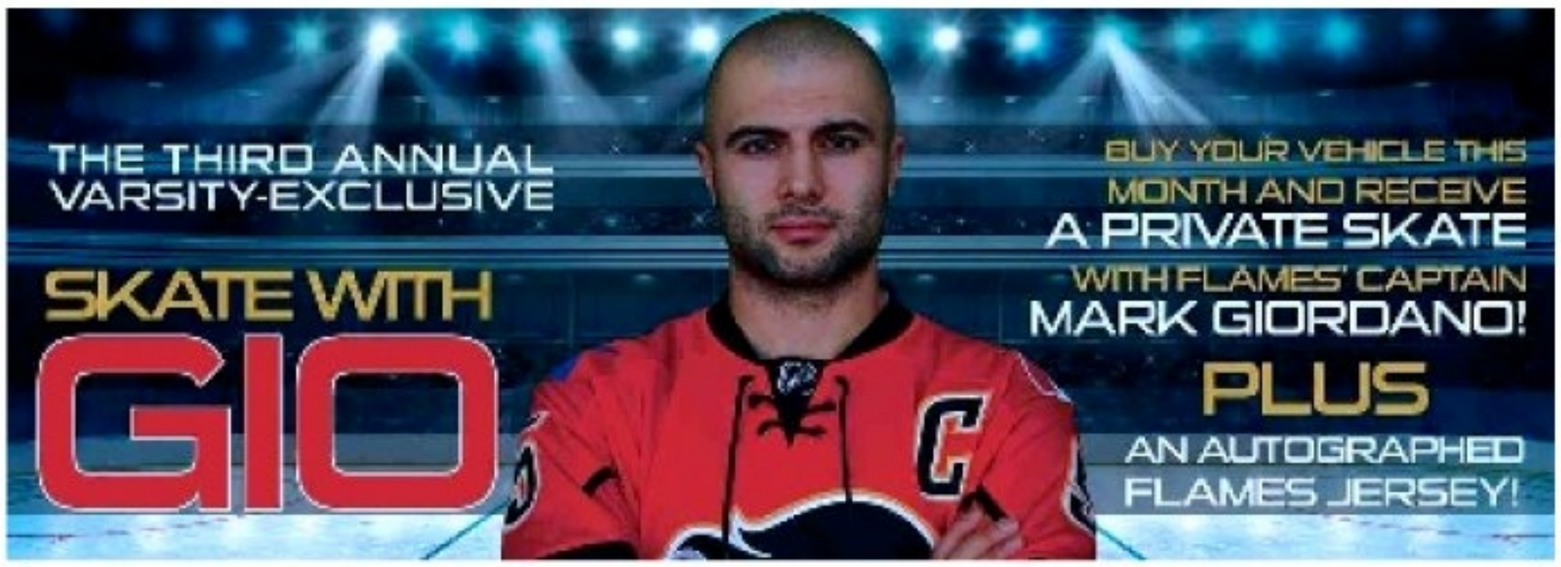
They walked among a holiday crowd along Shaftesbury Avenue, the newspaper reports.

Markle, 35, is a Toronto resident and actress.

The tabloid reports she has been staying at Harry's cottage on the Kensington Palace grounds. The British media reported that the prince visited Markle in Toronto earlier this month.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle were photographed together for the first time by U.K. newspaper The Sun. TWITTER SCREENSHOT



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Chrismukkah 'best of both worlds'

CELEBRATIONS

Elf and Mensch sit together on a bench at blended holiday

Erica Mark grew up Jewish but that hasn't stopped her from loving everything about Christmas.

The tinsel-loving mom happily embraces the seasonal traditions of shopping for gifts, decorating the tree and chatting about Santa with her toddler.

And she expects to do all of those things while lighting the menorah when the eight-day Jewish holiday of Hanukkah kicks off Dec. 24.

"It's easy to get swept away in the whole Christmas hoopla," says Mark, whose husband comes from a Protestant family.

"I happily got sucked into the machine."

This year's perfect calendar overlap — in which Hanukkah will begin on Christmas Eve and end on New Year's Day — is the epitome of what's come to be known by some as Chrismukkah.

Made famous by the defunct teen soap The O.C., the hybrid holiday has grown to become a full-fledged festivity in its own right, say its celebrants, who dismiss critics who fear it promotes Christian theology.

For inter-faith families, it's a genuine way to acknowledge both faiths with equal measure while teaching children about inclusivity, diversity and tolerance, says Morri Chowaiki.

"This is about tolerance, we're all one people here," says Chowaiki, a California entrepreneur who tapped into a ripe market by developing and patenting a Star of David tree-topper.

"There are so many (Jewish) people that celebrate Christmas and Easter. You tell me: What is looking for Easter eggs have to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ? What does presents under a tree and a fat jolly man with a red hat have to do with the birth of Christ? These are holidays. These are about giving children joy and warmth."

There's certainly no shortage of Chrismukkah products to ring in blended holidays. A quick scan of online sites and retailers including Amazon, Etsy and Pinterest turns up an array of tree ornaments shaped like dreidels and menorahs, a wealth of ugly "Hanukkah sweaters," and plenty of blue-and-white candy canes, wreaths and stockings.

Erica Mark, pictured with husband Colin and son Liam in their Toronto home, grew up Jewish but happily embraces Christmas traditions. CHRIS YOUNG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

There's even a six-foot "Menorah Tree," a massive version of the candle-holder with pine garlands wrapped around each of its nine vertical branches.

There's no wrong way to celebrate Chrismukkah, says Toronto mom Maya Fitzpatrick, who is raising her three boys Jewish but makes sure they also experience her in-laws' Christmas celebrations.

"My kids see it as a special thing, like you're not just celebrating one, you're celebrating two," she says. "You get the best of both worlds."

Fitzpatrick, author of the parenting blog Mayahood, says they enjoy a big turkey dinner, eggnog and a gift exchange with the grandparents.

"And then with my family, we gather at home every night and we'll light the candles in our own home. Then maybe once or twice throughout the eight days we'll have a big dinner with my parents ... where it's latkes."

Her home is decked out with both an Elf on the Shelf for Christmas and a Mensch on the Bench for Hanukkah, with the busy mom noting she feels pressure to ramp up Hanukkah celebrations. "If you ask my son he'd say he prefers Christmas, so it's really up to me to try to really make Hanukkah extra special," says Fitzpatrick, who refuses to put up a Christmas tree in her home.

If anything, Chrismukkah actually allows people to enhance their Judaism, argues Alan Masarsky, a California resident who says he came up with the "Yamaclaus" — a mashup of a yarmulke and Santa Claus hat — as a gift for his young nieces and nephews to help them better connect with their Jewish background.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

A flexible festive theme? No prob-llama

HOLIDAYS

The unlikely animal solution for Christmas-Hanukkah clash

Happy Falalala-llamakkah, one and all.

With Hanukkah and Christmas bumping together this year, a holiday theme for the ages is ready to go — llamas.

What do we mean? We mean cute and funky sweaters, T-shirts, holiday cards, wrapping paper and more showing off the cud-chewing pack animal for Christmas and Hanukkah, which begins the night of Dec. 24 this time around.

Oddly, the long-necked beast lends itself to holiday catch phrases for both: "Happy Llamadays" on a Christmas tree ornament with a little white one in a Santa cap, for instance, or "Fa-La-La Llama" on cards.

Looking to keep this quirky celebrant simple?

Jews can enjoy "Happy Llamakah!" instead on paper products and sweaters. How about the Hanukkah-blue sweater with a brown llama in black hat, ear holes included. Also, he's sporting Hasidic sidelocks.

These festive outfits are definitely of the "ugly sweater" ilk, with a side order of hipster. And lest you wonder the difference between a llama and an alpaca, look no further than the Christmas T-shirt with tree and a beast apparently named Larry declaring "Not a llama (alpaca)."

Dude, you're both camelids. Just sayin'.

Online sellers from Amazon to Zazzle are awash in holiday llamas ho-ho-ho-ing it up with antlers and Christmas lights, wreaths around their necks and wearing ugly sweaters of their own.

For Hanukkah, they're also in yarmulke, urging fans to belt "Llamakah, oh Llamakah," like the holiday classic. The Paper Source is selling blue-and-white Llamakah gift wrap with the animals in scarves toting menorahs and wrapped presents.

So where does all this lead? Well, directly to Barry Sellers in Manchester, England, for one.

He's a 34-year-old artist who used to do street graffiti under the tag "llamaphish" using llamas or a goldfish in an Army helmet, depending on his mood. Now, he's selling a T-shirt of his own design in — count 'em — 40 different colours with a goofy, bug-eyed llama as a Christmas tree itself, a topper star on his head, lights and garland wrapped around him, wishing all: "Fa lla lla lla llama."

Why, Barry, why?

"To be honest I have no idea. I've always drawn llamas," he said by phone Tuesday. "I think it's their facial expression. They've got a really funny face, almost condescending, like they're laughing at you."

He's selling through the DIY site Teepublic at the moment, where designers upload their images for use on all sorts of stuff, including shirts, mugs, baby onesies and phone cases. He's got plenty of company from others doing llamas.

"They're just a funny animal," Sellers said. "Even the name. It's one of those words that's just nice to say. It makes you laugh."

Yasmeen Eldahan, 29, is a school teacher by day, a New Yorker living in Cairo, and a seller of all things llama at Zazzle on her own time. Why? Because they sell, she said via email.

"I suppose it has something to do with the quirky nature of llamas themselves," Eldahan said. "They're not traditionally cute, nor are they particularly cool. They're unusual and humorous. And I think that appeals to people."

She said she hasn't branched out into Llamakkah items yet, "but I might consider it for future llamas!"

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

It's the quirky nature of llamas and alpacas that has attracted hordes of buyers to the novelty festive sweaters, say vendors. TIPSY ELVES VIA AP

British designer Barry Sellers sells his seasonal llama design T-shirt in 40 different colours through a DIY vending site online. BARRY SELLERS V

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Join a cult

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Not all iconic movies were box-office blockbusters when they were first released. Sometimes it takes a mixture of luck, patience, finding the right audience and big changes in the industry before a film really takes off. Here are four movies that earned cult status against all odds:

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975): Though the stage musical it was based on was a sensation, the movie flopped twice before it became part of the midnight movie craze of the late '70s. Midnight screenings, lax distribution rules, and audience participation went on to make it the longest-running release in film history.

And Now For Something Completely Different (1971): Independently financed by a Playboy executive who was certain Monty Python's Flying Circus could be repackaged for American audiences, this movie proved to be a dud on its initial release. However, once the Monty Python TV show was broadcast on PBS in its original format, the film was re-released to great financial and cultural success among fans eager for more.

Attack of the Killer Tomatoes (1978): This schlock horror parody recouped its modest budget, but was critically panned and didn't make any real box office waves. That is until younger audiences discovered the home video release. The film's second life on video-store shelves generated enough buzz to justify the filming of sequels a decade later, and videogame and cartoon spinoffs in the '90s.

Heavy Metal (1981): This Canadian classic had a respectable box office draw for an animated sci-fi fantasy film based on a counter-culture magazine, but that success was eclipsed by a soundtrack album full of massive '80s rock hits. The popularity of the soundtrack was nearly solely responsible for the film's cult status, since music licensing issues kept it from home video for over a decade, only allowing it to be seen occasionally on TV, or as a midnight movie in theatres.

Rediscover some of the most beloved cult films of all time. The Hollywood Suite Free Preview is on now until Jan. 5. Enjoy the best movies of the '70s, '80s, '90s and 2000s uncut and commercial-free on four HDTV channels and On Demand, available on most TV providers.

See all these films on Hollywood Suite this month. Catch a cult film triple bill of And Now For Something Completely Different, Attack of the Killer Tomatoes and The Rocky Horror Picture Show, Dec. 17 on the Hollywood Suite '70s Movies channel and ring in the new year with Heavy Metal on the Hollywood Suite '80s Movies channel Dec. 31. Learn more at hollywoodsuite.ca/freepreview.

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Can Moonlight spark a black gay renaissance?

ANALYSIS

Coming-of-age story explores issue rarely seen in mainstream

Neil Armstrong
For Torstar News Service

Actor Ashton Sanders plays one of three stages of Chiron, the focus of Moonlight, Barry Jenkins' lauded coming-of-age story. CONTRIBUTED

The acclaimed drama Moonlight has become a leading awards contender this season, giving hope for diversity in the year after #OscarsSoWhite.

But the story it tells, of a young black man slowly coming to terms with his homosexuality, is one rarely seen in mainstream culture — until recently that is. On film, on television and onstage, there seems to be a sudden convergence of art forms telling the stories of black queer people, especially males.

Moonlight joins the similarly themed 2015 indie film Blackbird, plus the hip-hop drama Empire on Fox, which introduced a gay love interest for Jussie Smollett's character Jamal earlier this year, and the complicated, diverse LGBTQ characters of Orange Is the New Black.

Onstage in Toronto, black queer characters were front and centre in productions this year including Secrets of a Black Boy, How Black Mothers Say I Love You and, notably, in Black Boys, a "timely exploration of queer male blackness" that just ended a run at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.

Are these productions part of a "black queer renaissance" as some have called it?

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times before Moonlight had its first public screening at the Telluride Film Festival, director Barry Jenkins said, "This movie was made for anybody who has ever felt other or like they can't be themselves and be accepted in society."

Compared to now, in the '90s such content was almost nonexistent.

There were exceptions, such as Jeffrey Wright's portrayal of the title artist in the 1996 movie Basquiat, and Queen Latifah's portrayal of a very proud lesbian in Set It Off.

And then there was Will Smith's intriguing yet problematic lead in the 1993 movie Six Degrees of Separation (played onstage by Courtney B. Vance).

At the time there was some controversy over Smith's portrayal of a gay character — a lying, promiscuous one at that — and what it might mean for his career. If anything, it helped.

Fast forward to now and Les Fabian Brathwaite of Out Magazine writes: "For the first time since perhaps the Harlem Renaissance, the souls of queer black folk have been depicted on our own terms as we take control of our narratives. . . This is the new renaissance."

Thomas Olajide, one of the stars of Black Boys, thinks it's a matter of serendipity to have a play he and his co-creators had been working on for four years come out at the same time that Moonlight is picking up award season buzz, including six Golden Globe nominations this week.

"It just seems like it's the climate for these stories to be unearthing very naturally," he says. "Perhaps we're all reaching a level of fatigue with not hearing those stories."

His co-star, Stephen Jackman-Torkoff, says "it's not just males but a lot of female queer people of colour (who) are really driving" the surge of such stories, at least on Toronto stages.

"Our communities have always existed," says playwright d'bi young anitafrika (She Mami Wata & The Pussy WitchHunt). "Whose visibility validates this idea of a renaissance?"

Having worked in the arts for 20 years, she notes, "What I can say is I do see a change in the visibility of black queerness in more dominant public spaces."

But Kimahli Powell, who directed Secrets of a Black Boy and sits on the board of the Inside Out LGBT Film Festival, says we shouldn't expect this supposed renaissance to continue.

"No doubt that Moonlight is a seminal work and its breakthrough is important," he says. "Yet when these moments happen — and they have in the past — we hope Hollywood has embraced storytelling and yet things remain the same.

"#OscarsSoWhite was just last year."

In terms of queer cinema, Powell notes people thought Brokeback Mountain would open doors for more movies representing LGBT people. That was a decade ago and little has changed.

"We definitely should celebrate that these stories happen to be shared at this moment but, unless there is a deeper shift in decision-making, we shouldn't expect more black queer art anytime soon."

> **This movie was made for anybody who has ever felt other or like they can't be themselves and be accepted in society.**
> Barry Jenkins, Moonlight director

metro TRAVEL

Your essential daily news

Pitbull releases details of his $1M U.S. deal with Visit Florida after House speaker sued for details

Boutique stays in Tel Aviv

For decades, the tourist landscape in Tel Aviv was dominated by mediocre beachfront hotels. Over the last several years, beautiful boutique properties have changed the city's hospitality scene and contributed to Tel Aviv's increasingly chic image. These accommodations are sleeker, smaller and often-affordable. **SARAH TRELEAVEN/FOR METRO**

MIDTOWN

Brown Beach House

This property is perfect for visitors looking for a hip and affordable small beachside hotel in an increasingly sophisticated part of the city. The giant neon pink flamingo out front and the sunny yellow furnishings set a playful tone. Some rooms have enormous ocean-facing balconies, and all have bright yellow or blue accents. The neighbourhood is ideal for exploring both the south of the city (hipper) and the north (more polished).

ALLENBY AND ROTHSCHILD

Hotel Montefiore

The original boutique beachhead is the Montefiore, which opened in 2008 and sits on a quiet side street. The Montefiore is all grace and discretion. The lobby restaurant — a fusion menu offering terrific pork and cabbage gyoza and wonderfully rich truffled goat cheese ravioli — is full of palm fronds and Art Deco light fixtures. The hotel's bedrooms are equally elegant, and in-room libraries offer a great selection of authors.

STEPS FROM ROTHSCHILD BOULEVARD

The Norman

The Norman is comprised of two 1920s buildings that still retain their original grandeur. The palette of creams and soft greys is complemented by Bauhaus and Art Deco touches. This 50-room hotel serves Mediterranean and Japanese cuisine, and showcases work by Israeli artists. Further cultural enrichment is provided through bespoke tours, including food tours of the Carmel Market and historic perspectives on Jaffa.

CENTRAL TEL AVIV

The Poli House

Canadian Karim Rashid is the designer responsible for The Poli House – the high-design (pod chairs, neon) new property that opened its doors in November. This stunning boutique hotel was carved out of a 1934 Bauhaus wonder in central Tel Aviv, and is the product of a three-year modernization process that remained loyal to the building's heritage. The focus of this 40-room property is a massive panoramic rooftop space with an infinity pool, cocktail bar and tapas menu. There's also a ground floor "cultural centre," complete with gallery space and design bookstore.

5 HOTTEST DESTINATIONS FOR TRAVEL IN 2017

Want to travel in the new year, but still not sure exactly where you're headed? Perhaps this list can help. From the in-your backyard destinations to the far, far away, here are some of the world's must-see destinations in 2017.

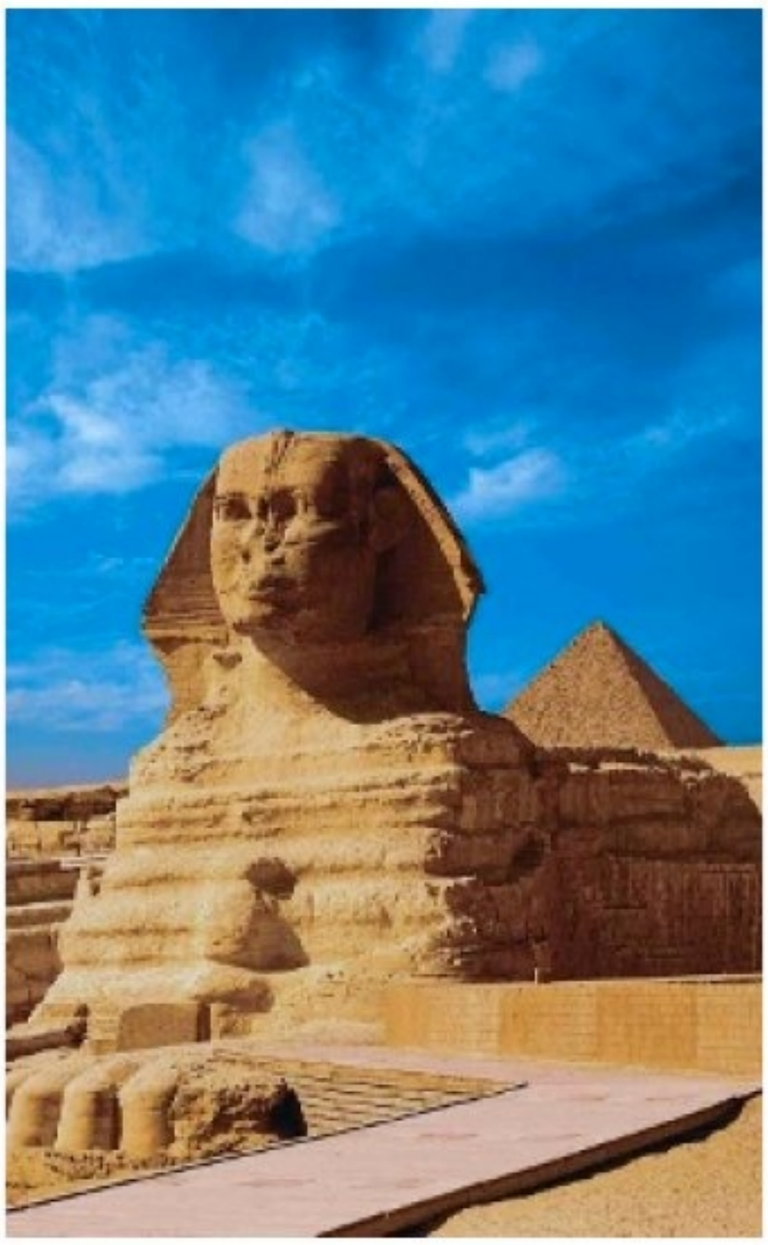
LOREN CHRISTIE/FOR METRO

1 Portugal

Due to cheap hotel rates and mouth-watering cuisine Portugal has risen to the top of many travellers' lists. Air Transat is increasing its direct flight service from Montreal and Toronto to both Porto and Lisbon and Air Canada Rouge is adding new flights to the Portuguese capital in summer 2017. For foodies, Exodus Travels has launched a collection of guilt-free vacations for people who want to hike, eat and drink their way through Portugal's Douro Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its award-winning wine.

2 Iceland

Thanks to its' stunning and varied natural beauty and a series of viral ad campaigns Iceland continues to be a top draw. Research by youth travel operator Contiki has revealed that the most desired travel experience for 18-35 year olds in Canada is to bathe in Iceland's famous Blue Lagoon. And if you think the idea of bathing with 50 other people at one time is a bit unsanitary, rest assured that the water is self-cleansing and renews itself every 40 hours.



3 Egypt

G Adventures reports an eight percent increase in travellers year over year heading to Egypt. Although numbers aren't what they were pre-revolution, it's a great time to visit some of the world's most historic monuments while avoiding the crowds and helping this former tourism giant get back on its feet. Built over 5,000 years ago, the oldest and largest of the pyramids of Giza, the Great Pyramid, is the only surviving structure of the seven ancient wonders of the world.

4 Cambodia

A recent survey by Booking.com ranks Cambodia as a top pick for 2017. The recent discovery of an ancient city below the stunning temple complex of Angkor Wat has further heightened interest among Canadians. Before you go check out, First They Killed My Father, a biography about the Cambodian genocide directed by Angelina Jolie that is being released as a Netflix Original.

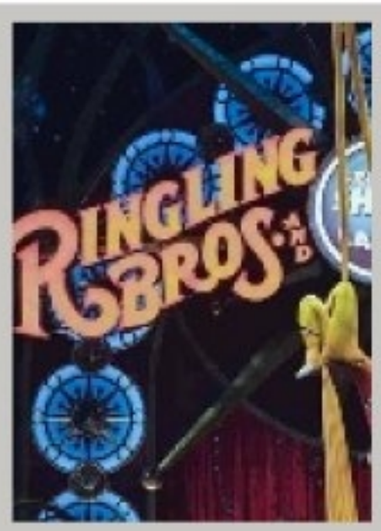
5 Canada

With the 150th anniversary of Confederation taking place there has never been a better time to explore our own backyard. The epicentre of action will be the nation's capital with more than 150 events planned throughout the year, but there will be plenty going on around the country, with National Parks waving entrance fees and Montreal celebrating its own 375th anniversary.

TRAVEL NOTES WOMAN TAKES THE REINS AT RINGLING, SPY SECRETS REVEALED AND THEME PARK PLAN ON ICE

Ringling picks its first female ringmaster

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus has its first female ringmaster. Feld Entertainment Inc. is the parent company of the Florida-based circus. The company said in a statement Wednesday that Michelle Wilson will be the first-ever female ringmaster in its 146-year history. Wilson starts her new role next month and her first performance will be in her hometown of Orlando. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



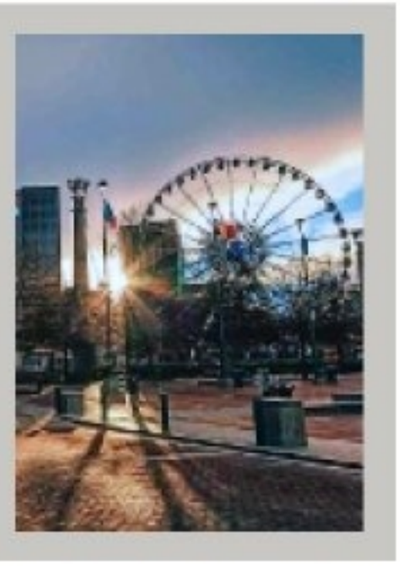
Paris exhibition reveals secret agents' tricks

Lipstick pistols, poison pens, explosive rats — a new Paris exhibit reveals real-life spy gadgets and tells the story of how secret agents around the world were recruited, trained and equipped during clandestine missions from World War I to the end of the Cold War. Secret Wars, which opened last month at Les Invalides, offers a chance to relive the days before espionage went online.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Atlanta $750M U.S. theme park 'on hold'

Just over a year after plans were announced for a huge new theme park north of Atlanta involving Lionsgate Productions and attractions featuring films such as the Hunger Games, planners say the project is being put on hold. Plans for the massive development had included a 200-acre theme park; two hotels; a 300,000-square-foot retail centre; and a 10,000-square-foot amphitheatre. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Cheap, chic and party-time central

BELGRADE

Floating clubs keep the fun going all night long

Knez Mihailova Street is the main pedestrian and shopping zone in Belgrade, and is protected by law as one of the oldest and most valuable landmarks of the city. ISTOCK

Tables with posh patrons spill out of cafes onto cobblestoned sidewalks. Roaming musicians ply tourists for tips against a backdrop of restored art nouveau buildings. Across town, the thump of techno beats keeps the young and well-heeled dancing until dawn.

Welcome to Belgrade.

The city is still dirt cheap for visitors, but its chic future is arriving fast. In some ways it's like Budapest with its ruin bars 10 years ago, or Prague in the '90s — gritty, full of life and undiscovered by North Americans — but with an added dash of style that neither of those hotspots had until they were already overrun with tourists.

Now might be the time for this offbeat destination. Air Serbia started flights from New York last summer, the first nonstop service from the United States in 24 years, and construction has begun on a 10 million-square-foot development that promises to transform a brownfield right in the city's core.

Winter temperatures average around 2 C, but New Year's Eve is an exciting time to be there, with wild street parties when hundreds of thousands of tourists, mainly from neighbouring Croatia, Slovenia and Bulgaria, dance at open-air concerts and attend fireworks displays.

Here's a quick guide to a city on the verge.

First things first: Belgrade will never be in the running for Europe's most beautiful city, partly because the former capital of Yugoslavia has been destroyed and rebuilt so many times in the past 2,000 years. Expect to see brutalist Soviet-era buildings and government buildings that were damaged in a 1999 NATO bombing campaign and never repaired. Despite the eyesores and neglect, elegant 19th century architecture also exists, especially around the main pedestrian promenade, Knez Mihailova street.

What the city lacks in European charm, however, it makes up for in affordable luxury. A one-hour massage costs $25 U.S. with tip. Duck pate with a bright smear of quince paste on the plate, aperitifs and a bottle of wine goes for $45 U.S. for two people.

Plenty of familiar hotel brands are bargains here, but why bother when a one-bedroom Airbnb goes for $27 U.S. a night? Stay in the trendy Skadarlija neighbourhood, a centrally located bohemian hangout with an artsy vibe, galleries, smoky kafane (taverns) and traditional restaurants serving rakija, a fruit brandy of varying flavours that's potent enough to double as paint thinner.

Thanks to a youthful population and reasonable prices, Belgrade has emerged as one of Europe's prime party destinations, and the banks of the Sava are lined with floating clubs called splavovi, which means rafts. They enforce strict dress codes and keep the party going until sunrise with a soundtrack of vaguely folk music set to driving house beats.

The party can begin earlier on land in the surrounding Savamala neighbourhood, where you'll find ample opportunity to hop between bars with names like Mladost and Ludost (translation: young and crazy).

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CITADEL

For a leafy respite from the gray city, head to Kalemegdan Citadel, a fortress that doubles as the city's biggest park.

Ancient Celtic tribesmen laid the first stones of the foundation, and its perch atop a ridge at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers was so prized that it was overtaken and built upon by a succession of marauders.

Beautiful scenery, cultural learnings

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

National Park hosted by all-Inuit Parks Canada staff

Jenn Smith Nelson
For Torstar News Service

Elder, Sophie Keelan was born on Sallikuluk, aka Rose Island — an important archaeological site and final resting place for over 600 Inuit. In addition to it's stunning landscapes, the Torngat Mountains region offer opportunities to learn about Inuit culture, history and the environment. ALL PHOTOS JENN SMITH NELSON/FOR TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

No images of rolling green hillsides, sheer cliffs, magnificent fjords or massive icebergs were taken on this day. Instead, my ears did all the work. After four days of maritime adventures on Labrador's scenic but stark and rugged coast, alongside ancient rocks more than 3.8 billion years old, it was time to listen.

The Torngats had stories to tell.

The immense tree-barren beauty and remoteness of the Torngat Mountains National Park and its offerings are both an adventurer's dream and pure form of cultural tourism.

Inuit gifted the park to Canada after a successful land claim in 2005. Since becoming the country's 42nd national park, it's become a major draw, where visitors can spend time with elders who call the unspoiled landscape home.

Through song, storytelling and firsthand experience, visitors learn about Inuit culture, history and the environment.

"Spending time with Inuit elders reinforces the connection of people to the land and place," says Martin Lougheed, Parks Canada's visitor experience manager.

Nestled into St. John's Harbour in Saglek Bay is the base camp, gateway to the photogenic Torngats. Hosted by all-Inuit Parks Canada staff, it's also home to a mix of visitors, including elders, youth, researchers, base-camp staff, performers and guests. Camp integration and community togetherness happens quickly here, making it feel like an adult version of summer camp.

"Being in a remote location creates a sense of camaraderie among guests, adds Lougheed. "Friendships are forged that continue long after their time together."

Weather-dependent excursions include hiking and venturing out to sea to take in the panorama, look for wildlife, and explore nearby islands and ancient Inuit villages.

For how incredible and vast the region is, it's equally treacherous. From polar bears to raging seas, moody fog and weather, it's not to be underestimated. Thanks to today's non-stop rain, it's too risky to leave camp, so the Parks folks gather everyone in the visitors' centre to watch a video presentation on Hebron, a nearby island.

Settled by a protestant sect of German Moravians in 1830, Hebron had once been the northernmost settlement in all of Labrador, and home to a flourishing Inuit community that enjoyed a traditional life in the rich fishing village.

In 1959 however, politicians working in collusion with the Moravians gathered residents in the church and advised them they'd be relocated to southern locations, such as Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik, in order to be closer to services.

Residents had no choice but leave their homes. Families were torn apart and once resettled, left unsupported. Great hardship and tragedy followed, with repercussions still felt today. Through storytelling and acknowledgement, healing and reconciliation have begun.

A man from the video looks familiar. Glancing over my shoulder, John Jararuse, an elder, sits three rows back.

Sophie Keelan is another elder also staying at base camp. After the video, our paths collide and she tells me she'd like to share her story.

Keelan is Jararuse's cousin. At 11 years old, they were separated by leaving Hebron.

At 68 years old, this memory is painfully fresh. "It was a sad departure, the saddest time," Keelan says, recalling as her family left on the boat Trepassey.

"They promised us good housing and jobs, but when we got to Makkovik, there was no housing at all. We had to live in a tent."

Tears begin to well in her eyes and then mine. "We lost our identity. We lost our family."

Still emotional, it's the second last day and a boat ride to Hebron means we will visit Keelan and Jararuse's home.

My place, as it's been all week, is at the top of the boat's bow, eyes ahead watching for wildlife and taking in views. By now it's also become my spot for introspection, perspective and internal reset.

Being here does something to you.

Arriving at Hebron, it's easy to imagine the once-vibrant life that thrived along its scenic shoreline, now littered with abandoned buildings and a giant church in the distance.

We explore the beautiful island and then are summoned to the church. Jararuse is sitting at the front, where he addresses us in a soft-spoken voice. "This used to be our church. Everyone was welcome here."

Not long after, Jararuse is beside me on the boat. Watching him, his eyes are transfixed on the shoreline, as they once likely were 57 years ago.

It's my turn to say goodbye a day later and Parks Canada Supt. Gary Baikie's words repeat in my head, "We hope you go home with a memorable experience."

Beyond an adventurous trip that included amazing excursions, seeing polar bears and aurora borealis, the region and its people encouraged a truly meaningful journey.

THINGS TO DO IN THE TORNGAT MOUNTAINS

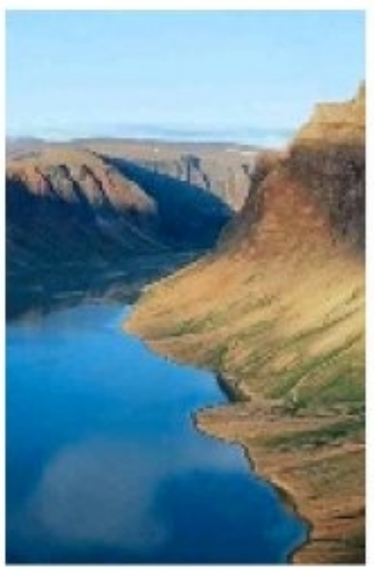
Visitors from around the world are drawn to the Torngat Mountains Base Camp and Research Station for the remoteness, adventure, and the opportunity to connect with nature, wildlife, and elders and youth from Nunatsiavut and Nunavik. Parks Canada staff plan daily itineraries and if the weather is favourable excursions to nearby islands are on the agenda. JENN NELSON SMITH/FOR TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

1 Iceberg and wildlife watching

Being out on boats nearly every day provides numerous opportunities to look for wildlife, such as polar bears, wolves, caribou, minke whales, seals and if you can believe it, even black bears (this is the only place in the world they exist north of the tree line).

2 Island excursions

Each morning, the lunchroom's whiteboard details the day's outings. Standout day trips include boating to glorious Silluak (North Arm) where the beauty of the Saglek Fjord astounds visitors. There, they can hike to a waterfall, pick fresh sub-Arctic berries, fish for abundant char and enjoy a beach fish fry complete with bannock made on the spot. Visits to other incredibly scenic spots like Sallikuluk (Rose Island) or Ramah are also usually included.



3 Take in the views

The fact is no matter where you are in this part of the country, striking views exist and hiking can be done most anywhere. Even at base camp, there are hikes to a nearby waterfall, a hilltop inukshuk and Torr Bay that provide the opportunity to get up a little higher and take in the view from above. Visitors can also rent an onsite helicopter (at additional cost) to fly up and around the magnificent region to take in the beauty of the Torngats peaks, valleys and waterways.

Splurge or thrift for ideal gifts

Spend big or spend small, two shopping experts reveal their secrets to finding the perfect present for everyone on your list

Jacqueline Kovacs

A self-confessed holiday shopping splurger, Loukia Zigoumis, the Ottawa-based lifestyle blogger and shopping and travel expert on CTV Morning Live, starts her gift list in November. "I like to ask for ideas from the people I'm shopping for to narrow down my choices," said Zigoumis, "but I also love surprising my loved ones with unexpected gifts."

That often means gifts with big price tags. "There are definitely items I think you should splurge on," said Zigoumis, "sunglasses, handbags and electronics, as well as travel." But she adds that her splurge items are well thought out — key to not blowing the bank over the holidays. Here's how Zigoumis manages to be a big spender on a budget.

Lifestyle blogger Loukia Zigoumis. JON NICHOLLS

Style expert Karl Lohnes. AARON HARRIS

Shop early — really early

Don't think of the day after Christmas as Boxing Day. Think of it as the first day of holiday shopping for next year. As Zigoumis points out, you may groan now, but your wallet will thank you later. "After the holidays is a great time to shop for big-ticket items," she said, "whether it's designer goods or electronics as many items will be drastically reduced." Make a note of what you've bought in your personal calendar and then hide it in a spot that you won't forget, she adds.

Make it a long-term investment

Consider splashing out on one "main" gift and keeping any other peripheral gifts small, especially if you have older children. "My boys, now 11 and 8 years old, received iPads a couple of years ago as their main gift," said Zigoumis. "They were great investments as they use them for fun and when they travel. It makes sense to splurge on gifts for loved ones that you know they will love and will last a long time." For herself, Zigoumis says the one big-ticket gift she'd like would be a Louis Vuitton bag. "Designer handbags last forever and the price is easily justified because you know it's going to be used almost daily for years."

Take one for the team

Instead of individual gifts — and the associated shopping time — for each member of your family, consider a big group gift you'd all enjoy. "Perhaps you want to take your family on a tropical vacation during the winter," said Zigoumis. "Maybe everyone's gift can be the plane ticket in a beach bag, along with beach essentials." On the flip side, you could draw names and attach a big budget for the one gift you're getting for just one person.

The trappings of wealth

Even inexpensive gifts can put on pricey airs if the packaging is on the luxe side. "I am big on gift-wrapping presents nicely," said Zigoumis. "One of my favourite things to shop for is gift wrap, ribbons and bows." Those less than skilled at wrapping can take advantage of gift-wrap services within malls and department stores. No one even has to know.

If you want to buy brand-new, top-quality holiday gifts and decor, you'll need to take Karl Lohnes' approach — shop year-round. "In order to be a thrifty shopper of any sort, you have to be willing to shop out of season," said Lohnes, style expert with Toronto's CHUM FM radio.

Need a new artificial Christmas tree? Wait till mid-January. "You'll save at least 60 to 70 per cent of what you'd pay in November," said Lohnes. And the same applies to gifts. "Pick up a beautiful cashmere sweater for half price in February and put it away for next year for your loved one," he added.

Great advice, but what if like many of us, you've just realized that you haven't given a thought to holiday shopping? Fear not: Lohnes has thoughtful, creative gift ideas up his thrifty sleeve.

Go cheap or go home

Embrace your inner penny-pincher, encourage family or friends to do the same, and take on what Lohnes and his friends call "the cheapie challenge."

"You have to shop at a Value Village ... or a second-hand store," he explained, "and you have to find a gift for each person — but leave the price tag on to prove you paid so low." Then, go to town on the wrapping and await each big, cheap reveal.

"You open them up and go, 'An alabaster ashtray from the 1970s!' But actually, it's really cool and — oh my gosh, just $2.99!" At the end of the gathering, decide who was able to give a gift with the most style at the lowest price.

It's make or bake time

We all know people who are exception bakers, sewers and crafters — and what better way to give a thoughtful, affordable gift than to give something you've made?

"To bake somebody something can really mean so much to them — especially if they're not a baker," Lohnes said. "If they're not a knitter, make them a simple scarf. These days, we are all so busy, so it's a thoughtful thing to do."

A little experience goes a long way

Who says a gift has to be a physical object? Sometimes the most welcome present is providing someone your time and service. For example, Lohnes says, you could make a gift certificate offering to walk a loved one's dog for four Saturday mornings so they can sleep in. Or offer to help clean the house of an older parent or friend. Same with a promise to give a manicure or take them shopping — whatever service you know your loved one might need.

The point, says Lohnes, is to think differently about holiday presents. "I think that gift-giving has become overwhelming for most people," he said. "There's so much choice and I think we need to put certain challenges into it — turn gifting into experiences. It doesn't mean that you're poor, but it's the idea that there's more thought put into it."

Be a wine aficionado this season

Peter Rockwell

With more wines in the world than needles on a Christmas tree, choosing the perfect bottle for those on your holiday gift list can be a challenge.

To simplify your shopping here are 10 tasty wines that will appeal to everyone from the burgeoning aficionado whose just getting into wine to the trendiest person you know.

For the wine newbie

Anciano 2007 '7 Year Old' Tempranillo (Spain): Relaxed and ready-to-drink, this Spaniard is one of the oldest reds on store shelves that's still in everyone's price range. Classically labeled and encased in an old-school gold wire wrap, it's all about mature berry fruit which makes it a perfect out of the box selection for turkey dinners.

Inception 2015 Irresistible White (South Africa): With a Garden of Eden-themed label this white looks sexy and tastes pretty much along the same lines. Big on stone fruit and up-front tropical flavours, it ends surprisingly dry, making it an all-around people pleaser.

Apothic 2014 Inferno (USA): This latest "limited release" in the ever growing Apothic family spends two months in charred, white oak whiskey barrels before being bottled. Though the booze is upfront and personal in the berry-rich aroma and flavour, it mellows itself out when the wine is chilled in the fridge for 10-15 minutes.

For the white wine fan

Kim Crawford 2016 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc Holiday Edition (New Zealand): For wine fans, Sauvignon Blanc is as synonymous with New Zealand as sheep and the All Blacks. Kim Crawford's version from Marlborough is arguably the quintessential example, with its gooseberry fruit and zippy acidity wrapped in gold for the holidays.

Marques de Casa Concha 2014 Chardonnay (Chile): No longer the popularity powerhouse it once was, Chardonnay still holds a place in many hearts, and is proudly served up on holiday tables. This balanced mix of bright fruit and massaging oak has "match with turkey" written all over the label.

For the red wine fan

Meiomi 2014 Pinot Noir (USA): One for those who love a fruit bomb that revels in its not-so-subtle, thick berry flavours. The grapes come from three different regions in California, combining to create a flowing fruit trail that tastes as good on its own as it will with poultry and ham.

Fontanafredda 2011 Barolo DOCG (Italy): While Piedmont may lack Tuscany's sex appeal, its juice, especially what's squeezed from the vineyards around the village of Barolo, are considered wine royalty. Brooding and rustic with layers of Old World personality, Fontanafredda's Barolo is a great introduction to liquid aristocracy.

For the fizz fan

Santa Margherita Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG (Italy): Prosecco is so red hot it has made sparkling wine cool. Best known for its sublime Pinot Grigio, Santa Margherita's spin on this northern Italian sparkler is all about accessible drinkability highlighted by apple and peach aromas and a zesty citrus flavour trail.

Veuve Clicquot Brut Champagne (France): Orange in label and classic in champagne goodness, this Pinot Noir-based bubbly loves to get decked out for the season. This year, it's housed in an arrow tin indicating the distance to Champagne from 29 locations. Look for Montréal; it's the only Canadian city with a shout-out.

For the hipster

Gonzalez Byass Tio Pepe Extra Dry Fino Sherry (Spain): Everything old is new again and sherry, long the tipple of "mature" drinkers, is having a bit of a moment with both mixologists and millennial-aged wine aficionados. Bone dry and best served cold, this fino is surprising food-friendly and will stay fresh for over a week if refrigerated.

Prices reflect the range across the country. Some products may not be available in all locations.

Tasteful gifts for foodies in your life

GOOD EATING

That perfect something for the home chefs on that gift list

Vicky Sanderson

Sure it's better to give to than to receive. It's also true that splurging on a gift for your favourite home cook could be an investment in good eating. Here are a few items that might serve the amateur chef and gift-giver equally well.

Blenders don't always get the respect they deserve as small-footprint appliances that do everything from blend soups to make mayonnaise to chop nuts and herbs.

Chefs, who are also connoisseurs of mid-century or small-space design, might like one from Smeg, the Italian manufacturer of compact, curved countertop appliances in a rainbow of colours. A Smeg blender, in a cheery seasonal red, is available at Lowe's, lowes.ca, for $349.

Brand new this year is Panasonic's Countertop Induction Oven, which uses induction and infrared heating to create what has been described as a toaster oven on steroids. There's almost no preheat time; in minutes, it's up to 450°F. That's hot enough to grill whole fish quickly with a crisp skin and flaky, moist interior. A one-pan chicken and veg meal can be done in about 20 minutes.

The non-stick pan that must be used with it is dishwasher safe, and each unit comes with a cookbook of recipes developed by the Culinary Institute of America. Available at major retailers and on Panasonic's eStore, the manufacturer's suggested price is $700.

Home chefs who already love Le Creuset's line of enameled cast-iron wear might covet the Dutch Oven in a zippy Tartan pattern exclusive to Williams Sonoma, williams-sonoma.com, for $550. Purists who insist on solids will be better pleased with exclusive grey, white or dark blue options. (Psst: A more affordable idea is a simple cast iron pan, a favourite of many chefs. Walmart sells a Lodge 6.5-inch pan for $1.)

Fresh herbs take any dish from average to outstanding. They are much easier to incorporate if the kitchen includes a unit from AeroGarden, which makes economically-sized indoor garden kits with full-spectrum grow lights and hydroponic, soil-free containers. Recent sale prices at aerogarden.com began at about $100.

The slow cooker has long been loved by home cooks. It's perfect for anything that benefits from lengthy cooking at low temperature, such as stews, stocks and cheaper cuts of meat. It also does soups, yogurt, pudding, grain dishes, and jams.

There are lots of versions of this versatile cookware, but the granddaddy of them all, CrockPot, has a clever new design twist. The Multi CrockPot comes with a 2.5- split, a four-, and a six- quart crock. When not in use, they nest for compact storage. About $100 from Bed Bath & Beyond, bedbathandbeyond.ca.

Le Creuset's Dutch Oven in Tartan. LE CREUSET

Güde Chef's Knife. LEE VALLEY TOOLS

A vacuum packer is a very efficient way to preserve food. So a chef can buy larger amounts of perishable foods, such as cheese, when it's on sale and/or available and use it reliably for a couple of months to come. It also seals make-ahead meals for road or camping trips, and busy weeknights.

Hamilton Beach has come out with NutriFresh, a vacuum sealer with settings for moist, dry and delicate foods, which are sealed in bags made of refillable, BPA-free plastic rolls. About $130 at multiple retailers and online at hamiltonbeach.ca.

Adventurous chefs will want to try the sealer to cook sous-vide, in which vacuum-sealed food cooks under gently circulating water at very low, very precise temperatures for a very long time — 24 hours or more. The advantages are virtually no volume loss, and excellent texture; the long, slow cooking apparently also makes magic out of tougher cuts of meat.

To do it, the cook will also need something like the Nomiku immersion circulator. About the size of a hand blender, it clips on to any pot, and handles the temp and circulation. It sells for $549 from Nella, nellaonline.com. Look for other, perhaps less expensive brands, at Amazon.ca.

Good knives are the foundation to a functioning kitchen. Knife nerds would be delighted to receive the Güde Chef's Knife from Lee Valley Tools, leevalley.com.

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Learn a thing or two on teacher gifts

CLASS IN SESSION

Here are some bright ideas straight from the source

Astrid Van Den Broek

When it comes to giving teachers memorable gifts for the holidays, you know the cranberry-and-cinnamon-scented candle you gave your child's Grade 2 teacher probably didn't make her list of favourite gifts ever.

So what do teachers prefer to receive? Any hints on how to pick the perfect gift for your child's equally perfect teacher? Here are four to give us the scoop on their favourite presents.

Alyssa Greenberg
Grade 7/8 French Immersion teacher
École Stanley Knowles School, Winnipeg
"One of my students once presented me with a concert ticket for an artist we both really liked," said Greenberg. "The card included a message from her indicating that she had the other ticket and really wanted to enjoy the concert with me. Though it was a bit unconventional — I don't know many students who want to hang out with their teachers outside of school — this was really a memorable experience for me."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "It's always nice for students to notice teacher's interests and choose a gift card that would suit their needs," said Greenberg. For example, Greenberg's students have picked up the fact that she's a baker (she often bakes for her students at Christmas). "So I've often received baking supplies and small kitchen gadgets that have been put to good use."

Heather Webb Makin
Teacher/Librarian
Eastview Public School, Toronto
"As crazy as it sounds, one of the best and unexpected gifts was a cocktail blender. I was teaching Kindergarten at the time and there were just some days I could have used it during the school year," said Webb Makin. "I now use it for cocktails in the summer, as well as smoothies throughout the school year. I totally didn't know I needed one until I got it."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "Most teachers, as you know, buy a ton of supplies for their own classrooms, maybe consider gift certificates at Staples or Dollarama," said Webb Makin. "These would be used immediately and the teacher would be forever grateful for that gift. As well, if you know the teacher has a class iPad or Android device to use in the classroom, a gift card to buy an app would not only help the teacher, but most likely your child in the long run."

Jennifer Sepetdjian
Grade 2 teacher
On a teaching exchange at Glendal Primary School, Glen Waverley, Australia
"When I left my fabulous Grade 1 class in Canada back in December 2015, I got the best gift," said Sepetdjian.

"The class parents and students put together a video of the kids answering questions about me and passing on some wise advice for my year away. It was eight minutes and 30 seconds of complete gratitude. I had to watch it again at home that night as I had missed so much of it that afternoon for all the tears in my eyes. I've never felt so appreciated in my 16 years of teaching."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "I suggest parents get their child to choose what to purchase. Those kids know that Mrs. A loves coffee, that Ms. J loves to travel or that Mr. D loves to garden and they will be so excited to present the gift to their teacher," said Sepetdjian. "If not, something from a local restaurant, gift card to a shopping centre, tickets to the movies, books for the class, time at the "pick an item and paint it" kind of shop and there isn't anything wrong with the LCBO (liquor store)!"

Miranda Tonery
Grade 9 teacher
St. Francis of Assisi Middle School, Red Deer, Alta.
"The best gifts have been the ones that came from the heart. There was a parent who was very creative, and she made Christmas balls with the initials of every member of the family each on their own ornament," said Tonery.

"I also had student paint a silhouette picture of my family in a sunset on a canvas."

Gift giving cheat sheet: "The best gifts have been the ones that came from the heart. However, large group gifts of a spa day is always nice as well."

GIFT IDEAS

1. Desk Set
HomeSense, $24.99
2. Buffalo Plaid Scarf
Winners, $24.99
3. L'Occitane Shea Butter Ultra Rich Body Lotion
Amazon.ca, $39
4. Metal Lunch Tins
HomeSense, $14.99 each
5. Tree Line Photo Pillow Cover
Indigo, Indigo.ca, $39.50
6. Corkcicle Tumbler – Copper
Indigo, Indigo.ca, $38
7. S'well Marble 17oz Insulated Water bottle
Indigo, Indigo.ca, $45
8. Picture Frame
Marshalls, $12.99
9. Superman 1,000 Piece Jigsaw Puzzle
Marshalls, $9.99
10. Porcelain Teapot
HomeSense, $19.99
11. Ballet Floral Jewellery Roll
Indigo (in store and online) $39.50
12. Portable Bluetooth Speaker
Winners (in store) $39.99
*Prices may vary

PICTURE FRAME, MARSHALLS

BUFFALO PLAID SCARF, WINNERS

PORCELAIN TEAPOT, HOMESENSE

METAL LUNCH TINS, HOMESENSE

CORKCICLE TUMBLER – COPPER, INDIGO.CA

It's time to spoil your furry friends

PAW-PULAR IDEAS

Pets know it's the holidays, so don't forget their presents

Ylva Van Buuren

Have a four-legged friend on your gift list this year? While the usual chew toys would be well received, why not use the holidays as an excuse to get something different, fun, and functional. Here's a 2016 gift guide for pets.

Wrap up the **Sniffany & Co Small Box Squeak Toy**. The plush turquoise and white dog toy has got its own bow and a squeaker for hours of stylish fun. *$24 at Shop Overstock Canada; shopoverstockcanada.ca.*

If your cat is a wanderer, use the **Nuzzle GPS Collar**. The pet tracking device uses GPS and includes a free Nuzzle app (no monthly or annual subscription fees either) that alerts you of location. The collar also provides access to emergency contacts and medical history records. The waterproof collar weighs just one ounce and is available in orange and purple. (Dogs can wear one too). *$189 at Hellonuzzle.com.*

Show you care with a glass **Magnet Set**. *$6.99 at HomeSense. Visit homesense.ca for store locator.*

Use the festive 10-foot **Retractable Leash** to take your best friend for a walk this holiday season. *$12.99 at Winners. Visit winners.ca for store locator.*

Fill the **Silhouette Treat Jar** with dog treats, and wrap it up for your best friend. *$19.97 at Walmart; walmart.ca.*

Amuse and exercise your cat with the **Smartykat Feather Whirl Electronic Toy.** The spinning feathers and unpredictable movements will keep Miss Kitty on her toes. $14.97 at *Walmart; walmart.ca.*

WOOF and MEOW Expression Frames are 4"x6" with matte black finish frames with silver-embossed words and an easel back. Wipe clean with a soft dry cloth. $19.50/ each at Indigo stores, Indigo.ca.

Personalize this 9" x 16" **Customizable Stocking** with a favourite picture, cherished quote and your dog's name! It's made from red and green plaid polyester, has a sturdy loop for hanging, and is machine-washable. *$40.25 at zazzle.ca.*

DanaZoo Crimson Bone **Stay-on Mat with Bowls** uses magnetic technology to help stop bowls from sloshing around while the dog eats and drinks — and making a mess. The 18" x 11" mat wipes clean, and bowls are dishwasher safe. *$24.99 at Sears.ca.*

Use the microfiber **Wet Pet Mat** to help keep floors clean when your pet comes in with wet or dirty paws. The 20" x 31" mat soaks up to seven times its weight in water and mud. A silicone undercoating eliminates skidding. The DanaZoo Wet Pet Mat costs *$21.99 at Sears.ca.*

The Umbra Fishhotel is an ultra modern fish bowl with glass inner bowl that is removable for cleaning with a white plastic outer shell. The 7½" x 7½" 'fish bowls' can be stacked to create a hotel effect. US*$40 from umbra.com.* Here's a great way to exercise — for you and your dog.

The **FitBark Wireless Dog Activity Monitor** tracks your dog's activity and health. The light weight monitor is eight grams and fits dogs of any size. It comes with rechargeable batteries, free apps and no monthly fees, in five different colours. *$129.95 at Indigo stores, Indigo.ca.*

Put a bow on this adorable **Bavarian Catnip Filled Owl.** The spelt filling provides a natural cushion, and guarantees lots of fun. No glue is used in the toy, just stitching. *$12.99 at Pet Value stores; petvalu.com.*

Product prices may vary.

"Honey, my gift is here."

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Gear up: New gaming hardware is here

NEW MACHINES

From next-generation consoles to virtual reality, amp up your entertainment

Marc Saltzman

Are you looking to get your game on in 2017? Get your thumbs ready. New versions of popular video game consoles are now available, not to mention cutting-edge virtual reality (VR) headsets to drop you "in" the game.

Expect these hardware platforms to be hot sellers over the holidays as more and more games are playable on them.

Here's a look at what's new and newsworthy.

PS4 Pro

Available for $499.99, the new and improved PlayStation 4 (PS4) console trumps its three-year-old predecessor. For one, it now supports 4K TVs — those new televisions with four times the resolution of 1080p HD — and offers HDR ("high dynamic range"), which reproduces a wider range of brightness levels, richer colours, and higher contrast levels. Even older games are now "up-scaled" to deliver more breath-takingly detailed graphics. And PS4 Pro also supports apps including Netflix and YouTube, both of which can display 4K video. This new black box also offers a faster processor for faster and smoother frame rates in your games, and the hard drive has doubled, from 500 gigabytes to 1 terabyte, so it can hold more content.

Xbox One S

Xbox has also undergone a significant makeover. Xbox One S — the "S" stands for "Slim" — is smallest and most compact Xbox yet, and also works well with new 4K TVs. In fact, along with supporting 4K games and streaming video services, Xbox One S can also play 4K Blu-ray discs, as well as regular Blu-rays and DVDs (PlayStation 4 Pro plays Blu-ray discs and DVDs, but not 4K discs). You also get 2 terabytes of storage for the price. With a starting price of $379 (500GB version), Xbox One S offers backward compatibility, therefore you can play a growing number of older Xbox 360 games at no additional cost.

HTC Vive

The most comprehensive solution for virtual reality buffs, HTC Vive ($1149.99) ships with a comfortable VR headset with twin high-resolution screens, and a built-in camera for when you need to see around you; two room-scale base stations that track your movement in a 3-D play space (no, you don't just sit down with HTC Vive); and two wireless controllers that let you interface with content. Speaking of content, the Valve VR store now has more than 700 PC downloads supported by HTC Vive, plus you get two games for free: a fantasy adventure called The Gallery: Call of the Starseed, and the fast and frantic, Zombie Training Simulator.

Oculus Rift

Purchased by Facebook for $2 billion dollars — yes, billion with a "b" — Oculus Rift ($849) also plugs into a compatible personal computer, like HTC Vive, and delivers an immersive 360-degree experience with VR games, movies, educational software, and more — including many exclusive titles you won't find anywhere else. Packed up with the headset is a Xbox One controller, but Oculus Touch is now available, for $279.99 for the pair, for a more engaging interactive entertainment experience. One of the dozens of launch titles for Oculus Rift, Farlands lets gamers explore an uncharted planet and discover new forms of life (including insects, fish and plants), while Lucky's Tale, included, is a fun platforming adventure.

PlayStation VR

Debuting in October, PlayStation VR ($549.99) works exclusively with the PlayStation 4 video game console for your TV. Set-up is a breeze, as you simply plug the gear into the PS4, mount the PlayStation Camera ($74.99) just below or above the television, and don the head mounted display (HMD) and earbuds, to be transported to virtual worlds. With a strong focus on gaming, PlayStation VR launched with a lineup of 30 games, including exclusive titles such as Batman: Arkham VR, PlayStation Worlds, Rez Infinite, DRIVECLUB VR and RIGS Mechanized Combat League.

Samsung Gear VR

Another player is the newly refreshed Samsung Gear VR ($139.99), which requires one of six compatible Samsung smartphones to experience virtual reality, by popping the phone inside the headset. Supported devices include Samsung Galaxy S6, S6 edge, S6 edge+, Galaxy Note5, Galaxy S7, and Galaxy S7 edge. After you insert your phone, you can run games and apps by touching a small trackpad and buttons on the right of the headset or via an optional Bluetooth controller, if you like.

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: XBOX ONE S; SAMSUNG GEAR VR; HTC VIVE; PLAYSTATION VR; OCULUS RIFT; PS4 PRO

Get your game on with these picks

VIDEO GAMES

Here are some thumb-numbing suggestions

Marc Saltzman

Whether you're into sci-fi shooters, role-playing games, sports simulations or head-scratching puzzlers, 2016 served up a ton of selection and quality for the discerning gamer.

In fact, therein lies the problem: With so many games released each year — for consoles, computers and handheld devices — it can be tricky to know what to buy. If you need some suggestions, the following are some top games of the year, divided into kids, teens and adults, costing $69.99 apiece unless otherwise specified.

EA Sports' NHL 17. CONTRIBUTED

Kids

• Hit the ice with **EA Sports' NHL 17** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One), a fun and frantic hockey sim that delivers the goods. Along with playing as or against your favourite NHL team, this disc or download offers more accessible and responsive skating and shooting controls, smarter goaltending, new modes (Draft Champions and World Cup of Hockey), a deep progression system, new animations and stadium art, and better commentary to get you pumped up while you play. NHL 17 is also the most customizable game to date, and features dozens of thrilling new goal celebrations.

• As with its popular predecessors, **Skylanders Imaginators** once again fuses action figures with a video game: simply place the character on the Portal of Power, connected to a game console, and the character comes alive on the TV screen — but now there's a lot more customization. Along with an all-new story, kids can create their own Skylanders for the first time, by tweaking their in-game appearance, powers, abilities, catch phrases, and more. Available for all major platforms, the $89.99 Starter Pack includes a couple of characters, magical crystal, sticker sheet, Portal of Power, and the game.

Teens

• Who said all first-person shooters need to be super violent? Rated "Teen," Blizzard's colourful and cartoon-like **Overwatch** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Windows PC) pits two teams against one another in fast-paced, objective-based matches in the future. Featuring a roster of diverse characters — including soldiers, scientists, and adventurers — your team will unleash extraordinary powers, traverse the globe, and even speed up and slow down time. Use strategy, tactics and reflexes to survive the fight.

Naughty Dog's Uncharted. CONTRIBUTED

• If car racing is more your thing, Microsoft Studios' **Forza Horizon 3** is an open-world racing video game that supports cross-platform play between Xbox One and Windows 10 players. Based in Australia, the game is roughly twice as big as Forza Horizon 2, and includes locations such as Surfers Paradise, Yarra Valley, and the Outback. More than 350 cars are available — the most in a Forza game — and along with various solo and competitive multiplayer modes, Forza Horizon 3 also features a four-player co-operative ("co-op") multiplayer campaign.

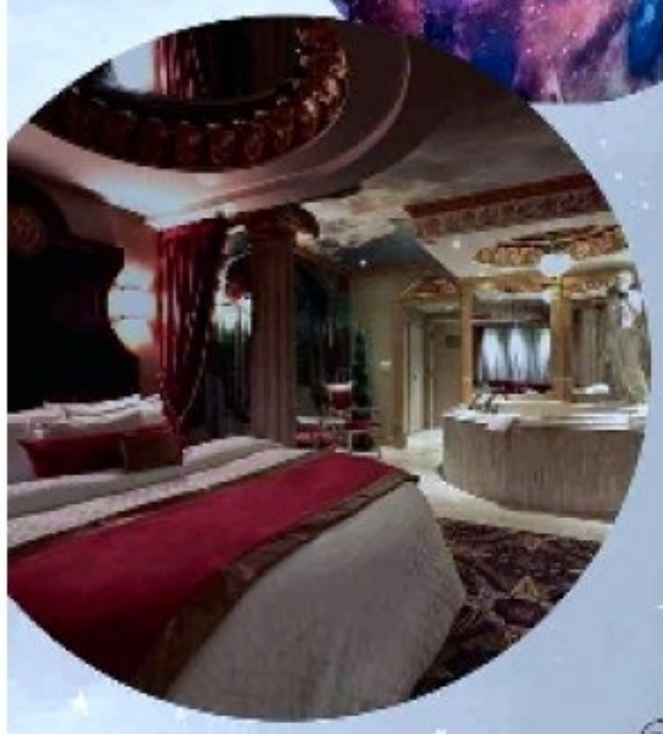
• After selling more than 110 million Final Fantasy games since 1987, Square Enix is back with a new installment in the coveted role-playing game series: **Final Fantasy XV** (PlayStation 4, Xbox One) fuses a real-time battle system with memorable characters and a gripping story that tells of Crown Prince Noctis who bands with companions to push back against an invading army. Many years in development, this epic single-player game features an open-world environment and cinematic graphics.

Adults

• Available for Xbox One, PlayStation 4 and Windows PC, **Electronic Arts' Battlefield 1** challenges you to climb into the boots of a solider and battle over land, sea and air in a large-scale action game set against the backdrop of The Great War.

Up to 64 players can use WWI-era weapons and vehicles — including massive air ships, battleships, or an armoured train — and experience white-knuckle combat scenarios with dynamic elements to ensure no two battles will be the same.

• Exclusively available for PlayStation 4, **Naughty Dog's Uncharted 4: A Thief's End** once again stars treasure hunter Nathan Drake — and other returning characters — in a large-scale, third-person and action-heavy adventure. Along with tight and responsive controls, this game delivers near photorealistic graphics, convincing voice-acting, a great story, and many memorable moments.



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metro SPORTS

Christine Sinclair has been named Canada's women's soccer player of the year for the 13th time in 17 years

Messier blown away by Jagr's longevity

NHL

Czech player poised to become 2nd in all-time points

Panthers right-winger Jaromir Jagr had 1,883 NHL points over his career heading into action on Thursday night. STEVE RUSSELL/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

44

Jagr's age. He turns 45 on Feb. 15.

Whether as a flashy rising star or as a battle-tested veteran, Jaromir Jagr has impressed NHL legend Mark Messier for more than a quarter century.

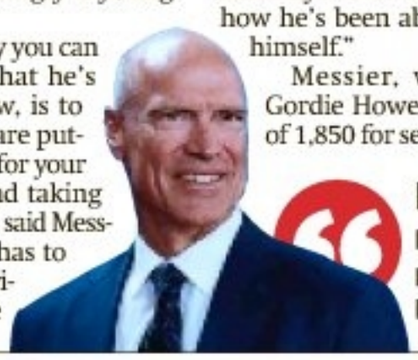
"When (Jagr) came into Pittsburgh he dazzled us with his power and his skill and his overall game," said Messier. "Later on in his career he's kind of inspired us with his passion and dedication.

"He's played long enough to understand what the game means to him as a person and as a player."

Poised to be overtaken by the 44-year-old Jagr for second on the NHL's all-time points list, Messier reflected Thursday about the Czech superstar's accomplishment in what has become increasingly a young man's game.

"The only way you can play, and do what he's doing right now, is to make sure you are putting in the time for your conditioning and taking care of yourself," said Messier. "The game has to be the No. 1 priority in your life because it takes a lot of time to prepare each and every game, let alone each and every season.

"You've got to give Jaromir a lot of credit for what he's been able to do early in his career, and then maybe even more credit for how he's been able to sustain himself."



Messier, who passed Gordie Howe's point total of 1,850 for second all-time in his final NHL season back in 2003-04, finished his career with 1,887 points. Jagr grabbed third place from Howe in March and sat at 1,883 points heading into Thursday's game between his Florida Panthers and the Winnipeg Jets.

Wayne Gretzky's all-time mark of 2,857 points isn't going to be equalled by Jagr, or likely anyone else for that matter.

> **In my own mind he surpassed me a long time ago.**
> Mark Messier on Jaromir Jagr approaching his NHL points total

Jagr joined the Pittsburgh Penguins in 1990 and won two Stanley Cups alongside Lemieux. He has gone onto play for seven more NHL franchises, but also spent three seasons in the KHL where he amassed 146 points.

Messier scored his 1,887 points in 1,756 NHL games, while Jagr has suited up 1,659 times in North America.

"This is kind of anticlimactic for me in a way," said Messier. "I understand the amount of time he put in overseas.

"In my own mind he surpassed me a long time ago."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

HOCKEY

Canadian juniors low on star power

Dylan Strome GETTY IMAGES

Without an obvious star player to carry the pressure and expectations, Canada's team for the world junior hockey championship will be all about teamwork, speed and desire.

The final 22-man roster that emerged from this week's four-day selection camp in Boisbriand, Que., is deep in very good players, such as 2015 third overall NHL draft pick Dylan Strome and Ontario Hockey League scoring leader Taylor Raddysh, but doesn't have a Connor McDavid or a John Tavares to claim the spotlight.

"We want to be a complete team," said coach Dominique Ducharme, the Drummondville Voltigeurs coach and general manager who led the Halifax Mooseheads to the 2013 Memorial Cup. "We've got speed, skill.

"We're reliable. We can defend. We're good at putting pressure on the other team. We want to put all that together."

The heat will be on Canada after a quarter-final elimination from last year's world junior event by host Finland.

And this year the stakes may be higher in Montreal and Toronto, where Canada won gold in two years ago. THE CANADIAN PRESS

IN BRIEF

Major League Soccer plans to expand to 28 teams

Major League Soccer commissioner Don Garber announced plans Thursday for the league's expansion to 28 teams, including a deadline for owners to apply and a new franchise fee.

The fee for the two teams expected to be granted next year is jumping to $150 million. Garber also set a Jan. 31, 2017, deadline for interested potential owners or ownership groups to apply.

The league recently expanded to 22 teams.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NBA sideline reporter Sager dies at 65

Craig Sager, the longtime NBA sideline reporter famous for his flashy suits and probing questions, has died after a battle with cancer, Turner Sports announced Thursday. He was 65.

Turner president David Levy said in a statement Thursday that Sager had died, without saying when or where. Sager worked basketball games for TNT for nearly a quarter-century. He had a third bone marrow transplant in August to fight an aggressive form of leukemia. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pats, Brady wary of battle with Broncos

NFL

Denver sacked New England QB repeatedly last season

Tom Brady visited the turf more than the end zone during last season's AFC championship game against the Broncos.

Blitzed and harassed throughout the 20-18 loss, Brady was sacked four times and hit a total of 23 times as injuries and a lack of continuity caught up with the New England offensive line, which struggled to find consistency during the season.

An off-season coaching shake up and some personnel changes have helped the Patriots do a much better job protecting their 39-year-old quarterback.

But they'll find out just how much progress they've made Sunday as they head to Denver for a rematch against the NFL's top-ranked pass defence and arguably its best pass rusher in Von Miller. In his last five games against the Patriots, Miller has 7 1/2 sacks, 10 tackles for a loss, two forced fumbles, a fumble recovery and interception.

"They bring a lot of challenges," Patriots left tackle Nate Solder said. "They're exceptional pass rushers, and they do well on the run, too. It's a real challenge all around."

The Broncos made Tom Brady's life miserable in last season's AFC Championship game n Denver. EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES

> **They bring a lot of challenges.**
> Patriots' Nate Solder on the Denver Broncos

New England has allowed only 21 sacks through 13 games this season, tied with Dallas for the 25th fewest in the NFL. By comparison, the Patriots gave up 38 sacks during the 2015 regular season, 14th most in the league, and their most since allowing 40 in 2013.

They've been most impressive over the past four games, allowing only two sacks. Rookie left guard Joe Thuney and right tackle Marcus Cannon have yet to allow a sack on Brady this season.

Thuney also has been one of the team's ironmen in 2016, starting all 13 games along with centre David Andrews. Cannon, Solder and right guard Shaq Mason have each missed only one game.

"It's been a whole group effort," Thuney said. "There's still a lot I can improve on, trust me. I try not to think about that stuff and try and improve on something little every day."

Thuney has been everything the Patriots hoped he would be when they selected him in the third round in the draft this past spring. He shined during off-season workouts and training camp, supplanting Josh Kline, who was released in September.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SOCCER

Europe calls for no World Cup expansion

FIFA has found a difficult opponent to president Gianni Infantino's plan to expand the World Cup to 48 teams.

A group of 220 of Europe's top clubs called on Infantino on Thursday not to increase the tournament from its 32-team format. The European Club Association said the number of games played each season "has already reached an unacceptable level."

48
Number of teams FIFA president Gianni Infantino wants to feature at the World Cup.

"In the interest of the fans and the players, we urge FIFA not to increase the number of World Cup participants," ECA chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said. Rummenigge wrote to Infantino ahead of a possible Jan. 10 decision on expansion by the Infantino-chaired FIFA Council.

Infantino wants 48 teams at the 2026 World Cup, adding 368 players in the 16 extra squads who would be committed to national team duty for at least one month. The FIFA president is already trying to please clubs with expansion options — including 16 groups of three teams — that retain the current maximum of seven World Cup games per team.

A bigger and more lucrative World Cup would help fulfil Infantino's election promises to FIFA's 211 member federations. He campaigned on adding eight teams to make a 40-team tournament and more than doubling development grants to $5 million for members from each World Cup.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

Peterson return boosts Viking playoff push hopes

Adrian Peterson's return to practice has brought much optimism to the Vikings late in the regular season as they prepare for a playoffs push.

Peterson has been wearing a brace supporting the right knee, which underwent meniscus surgery earlier this season. Peterson and the Vikings (7-6) are tempering any thought of a swift return for this Sunday against Indianapolis.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bucks break down Bulls

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points and Jabari Parker added 28 to lead the Milwaukee Bucks to a 108-97 victory over the Chicago Bulls on Thursday.

Milwaukee led the entire game and held a 24-point advantage early in the fourth quarter but had to hold on to snap a three-game losing streak, its longest of the season. Antetokounmpo has totalled 88 points and 35 rebounds in his last three games. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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A Director, under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act will make an application for a Permanent Guardianship Order for your child born on July 4, 2011. If you wish to speak to this matter in court, you MUST appear in court on this date. You have the right to be represented by a lawyer. If you do not attend in person or by a lawyer, an Order may be made in your absence and the Judge may make any Order that they deem appropriate.

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Satisfying Avocado, Lettuce and Tomato sandwich

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

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Ready in 10 minutes
Prep time: 5 minutes
Serves 2

Ingredients
4 basil leaves, torn
1/2 avocado, pitted and mashed
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1 tomato
1 teaspoon olive oil
1/2 a head of Boston bibb lettuce
4 pieces of multi grain bread, toasted
sea salt

Directions

1. Cut tomato and lay out on a plate. Coat with olive oil and sprinkle with sea salt. Let stand.

2. Meanwhile, mash avocado in a medium bowl and then add lemon juice and torn basil. Mix until smooth.

3. Toast bread and then smear about a tablespoon and a half of the avocado spread onto the bread. Finish by adding tomato slices and a few pieces of lettuce.

4. Cut in half or in quarters and serve with some cucumber slices.

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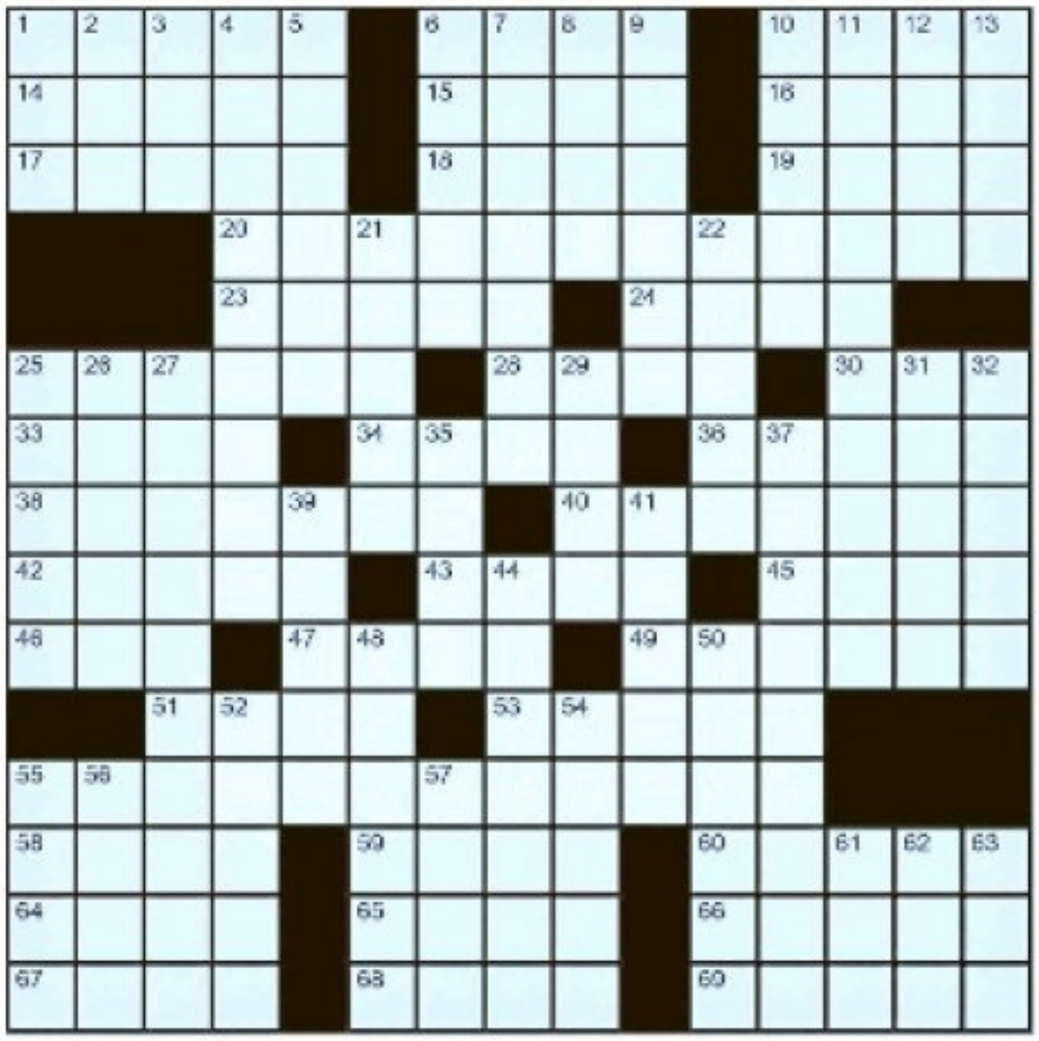
CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. Australian actor Mr. Bana's
6. "Sure __ standing here..."
10. Ladies
14. "Well, obviously, Sherlock!": 2 wds.
15. Ms. Rowlands of "The Notebook" (2004)
16. Prefix to 'matic'
17. Mouthwash brand
18. Car rental company
19. River of Russia
20. Make the best of a fierce Winter day all bundled up in a toque, scarf and mittens: 3 wds.
23. "Do you have a pencil __ I can burrow?"
24. All square
25. King Arthur's nephew Knight
28. Julie Harris' role in "East of Eden" (1955)
30. Initials-sharers of Emilio Estevez's actor brother
33. Roman love god
34. "Sesame Street" character
36. Stage stuff
38. Ontario town; or, Ms. Lohan
40. Maneuvered the motor vehicle
42. "Then...?": 2 wds.
43. Wealthy
45. Canvas for a survey
46. Check/determine
47. Starring role
49. Housing market
51. Staircase support
53. __ glue
55. #27-Down's answer is a what?: 2 wds.
58. Slightly open
59. Ballerina's garb
60. Apollo, for one
64. Blight
65. Util. bill
66. Bestow with a trait
67. Comedian Mr. Caesar's
68. Office table
69. Pre-weddings parties

DOWN
1. N nn N and N and n
2. Bird of myth
3. Nuptials vow: 2 wds.
4. Dishes/glasses storage areas
5. TV personality Ms. Shepherd
6. Tequila plant source
7. Time to catch the early train during the work week, e.g.: 2 wds.
8. "Put a sock __!"
9. Utensil for preparing potatoes
10. Soya __
11. Canadian song on #27-Down: 2 wds.
12. And others, for short: 2 wds.
13. Purchased, in another word
21. Sleeping problem
22. Sidestep
25. Posh parties
26. "Oh My Darling, Clementine" part: "... excavating for __..."
27. Sarah McLachlan's new release featuring classic Christmas tunes
29. Pear variety
31. Extract metal from ore
32. Woefully
35. Vega constellation
37. Quittance
39. Strong
41. Ache a lot
44. Conceptualizes
48. Joyful
50. Projects positivity, perhaps
52. Buenos __ (Capital of Argentina)
54. __ the guitar strings
55. Montreal hockey players, to fans
56. Bionic Woman's hometown in California
57. Candy canes time
61. Mount __ (Peak of Crete)
62. __-of-war
63. Greenlight reply

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS Your daily horoscope by Francis Drake

Aries March 21 - April 20
Grab every chance to travel, because you need a change of scenery. Likewise, you will love to learn something new if you take a course or study something unusual.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
You can make headway clearing up loose details about shared property, inheritances, taxes and debt. Just roll up your sleeves and dig in. Now is the time!

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You can learn a lot about your style of relating to friends, spouses and partners at this time. Observe your style of dealing with those who are closest to you.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
You have a lot of stuff, and anything you do to help you feel better organized is a good thing. What can you do today to make your life run more smoothly?

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
You want to play and take time off from drudgery, even if it's just catching a game or going out for dinner or seeing a movie. You need some fun!

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Because you will likely earn more money soon, this is a good time to think about how you can make home repairs. You also might be focused on a parent more than usual.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
This is a busy time for you, because short trips, reading, writing and talking to everyone will keep you on the go. Enjoy this accelerated pace.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
It's important to know what your money scene is. How much do you own? How much do you make? How much do you owe? Information is power.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Make the most of this time with three planets are in your sign. It's easy to attract positive situations now, which means you can come out on top.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You might want to hide for a few days, because you're not ready to step out into the world. When your birthday arrives, things will be different.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Enjoy your popularity with others now. Probably more than any other sign in the zodiac, friendships mean a lot to you.

Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
Because you look so good to bosses and VIPs, use this time to go after what you want. Promote your own agenda. Speak up.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

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			7					

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5	7	9	1	8	6	3	2	4
6	4	3	7	2	9	8	1	5
1	8	2	4	3	5	7	6	9
8	2	6	5	1	4	9	7	3
4	5	7	9	6	3	2	8	1
3	9	1	8	7	2	5	4	6
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7	3	5	6	4	8	1	9	2
9	6	8	2	5	1	4	3	7

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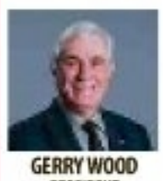

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